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Version: Version of Record

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<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000e03a>

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CONTROVERSIES AND CONTRADICTIONS:
APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF
HARRIET MARTINEAU 1802-76

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR EXAMINATION FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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SEPTEMBER 1991

Author number: M702617X
Date of submission: 19 April 1990
Date of award: 4 February 1992

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Controversies & Contradiction: Approaches to the Study of Harriet
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CONTROVERSIES AND CONTRADICTIONS:
APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HARRIET MARTINEAU

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a reassessment of Harriet Martineau's place in feminist and mainstream scholarship. It focuses on Harriet Martineau, first, as a subject of research and, second, as an object of text. The importance of Harriet Martineau as a *subject* of research is explored through consideration of her social position as a nineteenth-century, female, unmarried, middle-class, writer, reformer and intellectual. Further, it is claimed that she provides one of the links between Enlightenment feminism and the nineteenth-century women's movement in Britain, and that her prioritisation of economic and legal advances for women marks her out as an important feminist theorist. In particular her leaders on the condition of women in the *Daily News* merit wider attention. As an *object* of text, Harriet Martineau is investigated through the work of her biographers, ranging from her contemporaries to commentaries written in the 1970s and 1980s. In examining Harriet Martineau's writing and that of her biographers, opportunities are provided for the exploration of a range of issues within feminist theory and scholarship. These include questioning conventional notions of significance, the relationship between theory and methodology in feminist research, and the subjective reading of texts.

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APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HARRIET MARTINEAU 1802-76

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has been part of my life for nearly a decade, and many people have sustained and supported me through it. I would like to give special thanks to the following people: Richard Aldrich, Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David, David Doughan, Felicity Edholm, Judith Fewell, Morwenna Griffiths, David Hamilton, Lesley Holly, Donald MacKinnon, David Orsborne, Jenny Ozga, Margherita Rendel, Rosalind Russell, Dale Spender, Julia Swindells, Lucy Townsend, Ruth Watts, Daniel Weiner, Saira Weiner, Philip Weiner, Margaret Williamson; to Open University students on U221: *The Changing Experience of Women* (1983-6) and E813: *Gender and Education* (1986-91); to my colleagues at the Open University and South Bank Polytechnic; and to my history teacher at Dame Alice Owen's, Miss English.

Gaby Weiner,

London,

September, 1991.

PREFACE

My interest in Harriet Martineau was initially stimulated by a request to rescue Harriet Martineau from obscurity. In 1981 the noted Australian feminist, Dale Spender, asked me to write a chapter on Harriet Martineau for her book *Feminist Theorists*.⁽¹⁾ At the time, I had great problems in placing Harriet Martineau historically. Though clearly a woman of some note in the nineteenth century, I found little mention of her in modern texts on the nineteenth century, except in footnotes or among lists of Victorian celebrities. Further, I found difficulty in placing her in relation to nineteenth-century politics, though she wrote widely on politics and economics; and difficulty in locating her within feminist history since she began writing three or four decades before the nineteenth-century women's movement began.

When I finally began to comprehend the range of her talents and achievements, my fascination grew. Her autobiography, in particular, drew attention to her struggles to achieve economic independence and intellectual freedom. I therefore decided to continue my study of Harriet Martineau. During the 1980s, however, she has ceased to be invisible. Five volumes and fifteen or more journal articles or substantial pieces of writing about some or other aspect of her work appeared during that period. And the *Autobiography* and novel *Deerbrook* were reprinted in paperback by Virago in 1983.⁽²⁾ Yet, as my study progressed, I began to appreciate the complexity of Harriet Martineau's life and work. Not

only was her writing occasionally contradictory, but I also found it difficult to locate Harriet Martineau within some feminist discourses with which I identified.

For these reasons, there seemed little point in producing another celebration of her life. Thus, I began to establish a different critical framework for my analysis of Harriet Martineau, from which three analytic themes emerged.

First, I developed an interest in how we construct *significance*. It became clear to me, for example, that R. K. Webb, one of Harriet Martineau's most noted biographers, had a profoundly misogynist view of his subject's abilities, motivation and achievements. ⁽³⁾ This provided a marked contrast to nineteenth and twentieth century feminist evaluations of her work. ⁽⁴⁾ Yet both derived their accounts from virtually the same evidence and sources. Thus, the academic treatment of women appeared to illuminate the ideological perspectives of biographers, commentators and historians, as well as those of their subjects.

Second, my focus on women, such as Harriet Martineau, as subjects of biography and history, was based on anger at the unjust treatment of women in Britain *today*. I wanted to explore the processes whereby women are subordinated to men, across classes, religions and cultures. What are the processes whereby women are excluded from positions of power and assigned to lower paid and lower status jobs? How is domestic ideology assembled in such a way as to hold women

responsible for servicing men at home, at work and at leisure? Why does the public sphere still largely exclude women? How are these processes reflected in society and culture? How have these processes been reflected historically?

Third, I was also interested in the influence of feminism and women's movements on knowledge. How and why, for example, has women's or feminist history re-emerged as a discourse from the 1970s onwards? What is its relationship to mainstream history? Pursuing these issues led me into the extremely thorny and contentious debates about the objectives and meaning of biography and history, and their relationship to each other.

I distinguish, in this thesis, between *women's* and *feminist* biography and history. The former constitute studies about women, which may not necessarily be concerned with redressing gender inequalities or incorporating a feminist understanding of the sources of women's oppression. Many of the works on Harriet Martineau which are quoted in this thesis come into this category. They take a woman, Harriet Martineau, as one of their primary foci - hence they constitute women's biography or history - yet, as I shall show, they are often profoundly sexist and anti-feminist. Feminist scholarship, on the other hand, has more self-conscious purposes: it is, among other things, a critique and the construction of a new intellectual position. In Levine's words, feminist scholarship aims:

To offer a critique of the inadequacies of the traditional categories of scholarship with its false claims to offer an invariably positivist neutrality and objectivity, and to begin the process of constructing an intellectual position which fully embraces the experiences of women.

(Levine P., (1988), 'The History of Women', The Times Higher Education Supplement, 17 June)

I decided to expand my investigation to include consideration of Harriet Martineau as a case-study of how women are treated by biographers and historians and the role of textuality in this process. I compared my own evaluation of Harriet Martineau's work (largely based on her unpublished Daily News leaders) with those of other biographers, ranging from her contemporaries to commentaries written from the 1970s onwards. This, I anticipated, would enhance my understanding of recent developments in feminist theory and historiography.

I also made a year-long detour to establish whether any parallels could be drawn between Harriet Martineau and her female contemporaries. In a survey of women born in Britain within ten years of Harriet Martineau's birth, I identified 157 women with some degree of historic visibility. However, whilst this investigation cast some light on the life experiences of women living and working at the same time as Harriet Martineau, methodological problems, including major gaps in information on many women in the sample, rendered the survey marginal to the main study. (5)

Finally, it is the intention of this thesis (and the structure is organised to facilitate this) that my own interpretation of Harriet Martineau's life and work should be read alongside the evaluations of others; and both should provide an empirical basis for a more general exploration of debates within feminist biography and historiography.

NOTES

1. The article was eventually published as 'Harriet Martineau: A Reassessment', in: Spender D., (ed.), (1983), *Feminist Theorists*, London, The Woman's Press, pp. 76-84.
2. Harriet Martineau's first novel *Deerbrook* and her *Autobiography*, were reissued by Virago in 1983. The original publication details are as follows: (1839), *Deerbrook*, London, Edward Moxon; (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, London, Smith, Elder & Co.
3. Webb R.K., (1960), *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*, London, Heinemann
4. For example, Miller F. F., (1884), *Harriet Martineau*, London, W.H. Allen; Yates G. G., (1985), *Harriet Martineau on Women*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.
5. An unpublished account of the survey *Harriet Martineau and her Female Contemporaries*: a survey was produced for inclusion in an earlier draft of this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

WHY REVISIT HARRIET MARTINEAU?

The wish to offer an explanation for this study stems from the rigorous scrutiny that feminists have made of research processes. They have explored why women have been omitted from academic enquiry and why certain (male-orientated) topics, rather than others, have been taken up. They have also scrutinised the influence of the researcher's ideological perspective when defining and controlling the research process. It is important, therefore, at this stage of writing, to provide some information on the research perspective adopted for this thesis. Why has this study of Harriet Martineau and its examination of contemporary, biographical and historical responses to her work, taken this particular form? To answer this question, I need first to explore the development of women's history and historiography within debates of contemporary feminism.

The rise of the Women's Liberation Movement and Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and in Europe led to heightened interest in the rights of minorities and under-represented groups in society generally. Tuttle suggests that it was not until 'the women's liberation movement had worked a change in public awareness, [that there] was...widespread recognition that women's experiences and achievements had been ignored or minimised in every academic discipline'. (1)

These changes in awareness led to creation of 'Women's Studies', a multi-disciplinary approach to study which focuses, as its name suggests, on the contributions made by women to knowledge and to systems of knowledge.

History was perceived as an important part of this reworking of (hitherto) male defined knowledge and, as we shall see later, feminist historians played an important part in the development of feminist scholarship. As Hill has pointed out, one perceived purpose of history is to help illuminate the present by recourse to the past. ⁽²⁾ Thus, it seems inevitable, as Hufton suggests, that feminists would seek explanations for the current status of women by focusing on past patterns and trends in the subordination and exploitation of women. ⁽³⁾ Certainly, concern about the current treatment of women was one of the reasons why I chose to look at Harriet Martineau's historical treatment for this thesis.

Discussion of, and interest in, women's history (to be distinguished from feminist history - see Preface for discussion) has been enhanced by, but not exclusively related to, periods of feminist activity. As Mary Beard pointed out in 1946, ⁽⁴⁾ there has been a long history of women. Nonetheless, feminist activity and agitation generated a plethora of literature on women's subjects between 1880 and 1920, at the time of the 'first wave' women's movement. As political action declined, so did interest in writing on women's issues. Similarly, the modern feminist movement dating from the late 1960s has generated a burgeoning literature on women and history, exemplified, as we shall see, by the increased attention paid to Harriet Martineau in the 1980s.

What, then, constitutes the history of women? How does it differ from mainstream history? Who has written about women in the past?

If the past is like a foreign land, the history of women is not only foreign, but largely uncharted. This is especially true of women's historiography where no guide books provide topographical information showing monumental works, schools of interpretation, trends in research and amateur histories. Yet a tradition of historical writing exists in this field, and women have contributed most to its development.

(Smith B.G., (1984), 'The contribution of women to modern historiography in Great Britain, France and the United States 1750-1940', *American Historical Review*, 83, 9, June, p. 89)

As the above quote suggests, it is women themselves who have most contributed to writing the history of their own sex. It has clearly been more of an interest for, and in the interests of, women than men to research the female past. Most women historians, according to Smith, ⁽⁵⁾ produced at least one work directly concerned with members of their own sex or with topics they believed illustrative of women's interests. For instance, Catherine Macauley (1731-91) produced a conventional political history and also wrote, in 1790, about the importance of female education and coeducation in *Letters on Education*. ⁽⁶⁾ And, as we shall see, Harriet Martineau addressed women's issues as well as producing her *History*.

Further, when it departed from conventional subject matter and research methodology, say, to explore 'witchcraft, mansions and marriage', women's history went unrecognised. According to Smith, women historians made distinctive contributions to historical scholarship', yet they were insufficiently appreciated - their studies were often dismissed as overly 'chatty' or 'impressionistic'. ⁽⁷⁾

Women's historiography developed from a wide range of historical and antiquarian studies as well as biography and histories based upon the lives of great women, as the illustrative bibliography to Mary Beard's *Woman as a Force in History* indicates. ⁽⁸⁾ Moreover, like others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the woman scholar was a polymath, working in a variety of fields of interest, producing not only historical studies but also scientific treatises, didactic and moral essays, biographies and general literary works. Harriet Martineau's vast output offers a useful example here.

Translating the works of men was a popular preoccupation for many women scholars. De Stael wrote in 1816, 'there is no higher service to perform for literature than to carry from one language to another the masterpieces of the human spirit.' ⁽⁹⁾ In England, Sarah Austin (1793-1867) translated the works of Leopold Von Ranke and Victor Cousin, ⁽¹⁰⁾ Cecilia M. Ady (1881-1958), the work of Benedetto Croce ⁽¹¹⁾ and, Harriet Martineau, the work of the sociologist, Auguste Comte. ⁽¹²⁾ In France, Clemence Royer (1830-1902) translated Charles Darwin's work ⁽¹³⁾ and in the United States Mary L. Booth (1831-1899) translated the writing of Edouard Laboulaye. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Much of the history of the nineteenth century was devoted to charting the lives and accomplishments of 'great men' whose deeds symbolized ambition and evolutionary progress. For example, the nineteenth century historian Thomas Carlyle produced biographical works on Burns, Samuel Johnson, Goethe, Voltaire, Diderot, Schiller, Frederick the Great and Knox. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Women historians were no less affected by the cult of the great historical figure and a variety of biographies of women appeared in the last decades

of the nineteenth century. The Eminent Women Series, ⁽¹⁶⁾ for example, included biographies of George Eliot, Emily Bronte, George Sand, Mary Lamb, Maria Edgeworth and Margaret Fuller as well as of Harriet Martineau.

In the second half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries, in parallel with men, the achievements of women were recorded in numerical studies, such as Sutton Castle's Statistical Study of Eminent Women, carried out in 1913. ⁽¹⁷⁾ In that survey, Mary Stuart (1542-1587) was ranked first, Joan of Arc (1411-1431) second, and Harriet Martineau 52nd in eminence among women throughout the world and through the ages.

Moreover, as is evident in the commentaries of Harriet Martineau reported later in this thesis, the treatment of individual women by biographers and historians was likely to vary over time, according to their perspectives on women. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft's 'Vindication of the Rights of Woman' received both accolades and criticisms when it was first published.

Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman...was praised by many of her radical contemporaries, including Tom Paine and Mary's husband, the radical anarchist philosopher and social theorist, William Godwin. It was condemned, sometimes vitriolically, by other contemporaries, including, notoriously, Horace Walpole, who called Mary a 'hyene in petticoats' and refused to have her book in his library. The Historical Magazine declared, in 1799, that her work should be read 'with disgust by any female who has any pretensions to delicacy; with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality...' It was not only men who condemned it. Many women disliked it intensely, including Hannah More, who felt justified in condemning it without having read it.

(Grimshaw J., (1989), 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the tensions of feminist philosophy', Radical Philosophy, 52, Summer, p. 11)

The reputation of Madame de Stael (1766-1817), the French writer, suffered from similar treatment. Nineteenth century women writers considered that her work reflected, in part at least, the interests of women with intellect; in the early twentieth century, the scandals of her life became the object of historical enquiry; and more recently, women historians have been less interested than their nineteenth century counterparts in her as representative of intellectual women. ⁽¹⁸⁾

I shall return to issues related to the genre of biography later in this thesis, though the overstrict adherence to genre boundaries has itself drawn criticism from Schenck. ⁽¹⁹⁾ At this point, it is more appropriate to explore the more general framework of social history which seems to have been more popular with women historians. Women historians were more likely to experiment with social history than their male counterparts: perhaps because social history provided a broader remit and could embrace portrayals of social as well as political or constitutional relationships. Thus, Harriet Martineau wrote her History to portray individuals as representative of ideas and degrees of social progress. Other female social historians focused specifically on women. For example, Georgiana Hill produced *Women in English Life* in 1896, and Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* in 1922. ⁽²⁰⁾

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the ideology of the 'feminine ideal' which emerged from social darwinism and the separate sphere dualism of the Victorian period, marked a change in women's history. Scholars thereafter focused, in the main, on exploring the *ethical* past of women by searching the record for evidence of explicitly feminine or

maternal virtue. Their treatment of Florence Nightingale, and again of Mary Wollstonecraft, provide telling examples of this. ⁽²¹⁾

The renewed fascination of this period with archives, inscriptions, manuscripts, and other primary sources, instigated by Ranke and his followers, also had an impact on women's history. Women scholars concentrated on supplementing the work of male historians though occasionally used state papers and manuscript sources to focus on women's issues. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was one such example in her work on *British Freewomen; Their Historical Privilege* published in 1894. ⁽²²⁾ Women now had opportunities for entry into universities to train as historians yet few found employment there: so research by women remained, of necessity, a 'gentlewomanly' pursuit.

In the early twentieth century, university women continued their annotations of manuscripts and their pursuit of political history, while some non-academics such as Vernon Lee (1856-1935) ⁽²³⁾ and Ray Strachey (1887-1940) ⁽²⁴⁾ wrote about women, enthused by the activity of the suffrage campaigns. A major shift in emphasis came from America with the work of Mary Beard (1876-1958) in the 1930s and 1940s, who was the first to acknowledge the long tradition of women's historiography. Beard claimed that women had done more than merely exist, bear and rear children. 'They have played a great role in directing human events. Women have been a force in making all the history that has been made'. ⁽²⁵⁾

In *On Understanding Women* published in 1931, and *America Through Women's Eyes* published in 1933, ⁽²⁶⁾ she argued that male 'fragmenters' had

wilfully distorted history by ignoring the hundreds of books written by women about women's past. Now, she argued, heterodoxy ought to determine the writing of history - so that, for instance, biographies of women and studies of social life and customs would count as valid contributions to the historical record. In this way, 'all culture', not just male culture would be included. Beard maintained that the perspective on history would be different through women's eyes. Her predecessors in women's history thus became her 'witnesses to a different record of the past in which women were not only authors of deeds but also authors of histories.' (27)

Thus Beard's understanding of the feminist interpretation of history and her recognition of a female tradition in historical narration formed the interface between the women's historiographical tradition of a century or more and renewed feminist interest in the history of women from the 1960s onward.

Joan Kelly-Gadol (28), writing some fifty years later, suggests that feminist historians have to do more than, as Beard wished, merely restore women to history. They have another goal of restoring history to women. To have undertaken a historical study of Harriet Martineau's work, focusing perhaps on her feminism and role as an educator, might have fulfilled the first feminist goal - she would certainly have become more visible in history. However, adopting such an approach, in my view, would have merely 'added on' Harriet Martineau to conventional historical enquiry. (29) Nonetheless, this study attempts a fresh appraisal of her work and achievements. This study is rather more ambitious. It digs deeper in order to uncover the processes whereby Harriet Martineau was dismissed as a nineteenth century curiosity of little value to twentieth century historians, only to be rediscovered by feminist historians and researchers in the 1980s.

By scrutinising both Harriet Martineau's life and work and commentaries about her, it is hoped that this study will contribute, as Mary Beard did in the 1940s, to feminist *understanding* of how and why academic knowledge is created and how sexist bias, largely of male historians and biographers (who are no more or less prejudiced than other scholars) can be addressed and challenged. In so doing, this study will also contribute to the project of restructuring academic knowledge to include women's experiences; so that history, as Joan Kelly-Gadol suggests, indeed, will be restored to women. But, first, this chapter considers the principal reasons for the choice of Harriet Martineau as the subject of this study. It

focuses, in particular, on her gender, unmarried state, class and position as a Victorian intellectual.

Why Gender is Important in Historical Research

Adopting women as subjects of study offers a number of challenges to conventional enquiry. Two of the most important are the conceptualisation of 'woman' or 'women' as a group or social category with different historical and cultural experiences to those of men, and the impact of this on theories of social change.

Many academics have found it hard to include women in their work. Analyses, for instance, of public and political affairs, international incidents and the development of ideas have (consciously or unconsciously) excluded women, since, until recently, they had no formal representation, let alone leadership, among the decision-makers, and little access to institutions of learning and intellectual enquiry. Justification for not focusing on women, where it was felt necessary, was based on the perceived 'natural' qualities of women so much more suitable to the home than to the public arena. The public arena, nonetheless, was clearly of much greater interest and importance.

In response to this state of affairs, feminists first established that women could (and should) be treated as a distinctive social group, and second, that women's invisibility should *not* be attributed to female biology. Feminists showed that the mere fact

of being a woman meant having a particular kind of social and historical experience, a point that I will stress later in relation to Harriet Martineau. It proved more difficult, however, to establish an exact meaning of 'woman' or 'women' in a historical or social sense. ⁽³⁰⁾ Some, for example, Redstocking Manifesto and Shulamith Firestone saw women as a universally oppressed class. ⁽³¹⁾ Others, for example, Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham, traced women's secondary status to economic conditions; to their distinct relation to the means of production. ⁽³²⁾ Informed by Marxism, both groups used the concept of class: the former to maintain that women constituted a sex/class, and the latter, that class should be re-analysed as a gendered concept. ⁽³³⁾

Both groups also agreed that 'woman' as a category cut through male class systems and that women generally occupied subordinate positions within classes. Women had been perceived as the 'other' in relation to men, across classes, races and cultures, because of what was termed as their 'natural attributes'. The term 'woman', as used in the nineteenth century conceptualisation of the 'Woman Question' also proved problematic. It implied a distinctive female experience, yet it was evident that women's historical experiences were as much distinguished by their class, ethnic and cultural relations as they were by their sex.

Feminist historians also challenged theories of social change. Engels' analysis ⁽³⁴⁾ of the subordination of women in terms of the emergence of private property and class inequality was recognised as

basic to much of feminist scholarship. More recent questions have focused on the continued existence and maintenance of patriarchal structures and their relationship to capitalism. Once again there were different interpretations of patriarchy and patriarchal relations. Radical feminists, such as Firestone, explained patriarchy in terms of the inevitability and universality of male domination over the sex/class of woman. (35) Marxist feminists, such as Mitchell and Rowbotham, viewed patriarchal relations as historically and culturally specific - views, incidentally, which I share. The latter explored questions about whether, for example, women's position had *always*, in every case, been subordinate to that of men? How had changes in the sexual division of labour reshaped the historical experiences of women (and men); for example, between the family domestic enterprise of pre-industrial England, and the separation, in Victorian times, of men and women's lives into the public and private spheres? Crucially, where the distance between the family and public life was large, as in Victorian England, women's status was low; and where family activities coincided with public or social life, the status of woman was likely to be comparable to that of men. (36)

Moreover, women were conceptualised as both producers and reproducers with a distinctive relation to the means of production. The twin structures of capitalism and patriarchy shaped women's involvement in production both for subsistence (maintenance of the workforce) and for exchange (sale of goods and services):

I suggest that what shapes the relation of the sexes is the way this work of procreation and socialisation is organised in relation to the organisation of work that results in articles for subsistence and/or change. In sum, what patriarchy means as a general social order is that women function as the property of men in the maintenance and production of new members of the social order; that these relations of production are worked out in the organisation of kin and family; and that other forms of work, such as production of goods and services for immediate use, are generally, though not always, attached to these procreative and socialising functions

(Kelly-Gadol J., (1987), 'The social relations of the sexes; methodological implications of women's history', in Harding S. (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, p. 23)

Clearly ownership of property (ie class) and not gender, was a factor separating people into employers and workers. But gender was significant in the distribution of property relations *within* classes. Certainly during the period in which this thesis is located, women had few rights to property, whatever their class.

Thus feminists maintained that in order to develop a valid approach to historical research, women's experience had to be recognised as a first order category. ⁽³⁷⁾ On the one hand, by focusing on gender in their analysis, they showed that women shared common experiences across classes and cultures in terms of their responsibilities in the domestic and private sphere. On the other hand, they revealed the deficiencies in existing methods of class analysis: women did not really 'fit' existing analyses of class and property relations. Hence, adopting a gender perspective demanded a thorough revision of historical theories of political and social, change and experience.

This study of Harriet Martineau aims to illuminate both the complexities and contradictions facing a woman living and working in the mid-nineteenth century England and the gendered assessments of her contemporaries and later commentators.

Spinster Studies! An Alternative Historical Dimension.

The fact that Harriet Martineau never married was an additional factor in the choice of her as a subject of study. In the nineteenth century, women's 'natural' domestic attributes, fitting them for their vocational callings as wives, mothers, housekeepers and domestic managers, helped define them, whatever class, as the 'other' in relation to men. The assumption was that marriage and motherhood were the inevitable destiny of women. Unmarried women such as Harriet Martineau, were thus placed in a difficult position. On the one hand, their feminine identity was under threat. They were considered not to be 'true' women - single women were frequently characterised as ugly, barren and sex-starved (for example, in the Daumier cartoons in the columns of *Punch*).⁽³⁸⁾ On the other hand, unattached women were freer to pursue activities and careers outside the domestic sphere.

Contemporary debates concerning the role of single women in the nineteenth century deemed them as problematic. Concern was expressed about the large number of 'surplus' women of marriageable age in relation to men; and the economic plight of those women who were unable to marry. Certainly female career opportunities

narrowed between the 1790s and the 1850s as Victorian ideology became more entrenched. In their study of middle-class communities in Suffolk and Birmingham, Davidoff and Hall ⁽³⁹⁾ found that in the 1790s, recorded female occupations included gaoler, whitesmith, plumber, butcher, farmer, seedsman, tailor and saddler. By the 1850s, dressmaking, millinery and teaching were by far the main occupational groupings for middle-class women. Doubts were also expressed about the perceived lack of any real purpose in the lives of single women; and there were hints of fears about their uncontained sexuality. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Modern feminists, in contrast, have been less concerned with the historical experiences of single women. Their major interest has been the separate sphere existence of the women and men generally, particularly in relation to the development of the nineteenth-century family. ⁽⁴¹⁾ Single women have only been of interest insofar as concern about surplus women, and the poverty of the governess, opened up the first debates in the nineteenth century about women's education and women's rights. ⁽⁴²⁾

However, some feminists, both contemporary and modern, have viewed the Victorian state of spinsterhood in a much more positive light. Banks ⁽⁴³⁾ found that a large proportion of her first cohort of feminists born before 1828 were single women, and it is clear that despite their narrowed career opportunities, spinsterhood brought self-acknowledged benefits to independent, working women like Harriet Martineau. Contemporary feminist writers like Maria Grey

and Emily Shirreff, made the case for remaining single by questioning what women were likely to gain (and lose) on marriage:

A woman should be reminded...that in marrying she gives up many advantages. Her independence is, of course, renounced by the very act that makes her another's. Her habits, pursuits, society, sometimes even friendships, must give way to his, and this readily and cheerfully as part of the obligations of a wife...The single woman must repress these affections [domestic happiness] and renounce the hope of being the object of exclusive love; but on the other hand she retains her independence, and her own friends...; and the feelings and capacities which with the married woman are concentrated within the home, may by her be exercised on a higher scale for the benefit of a larger circle, and bring her all the happiness...which results from the active exercise of our faculties towards a worthy object.

(Grey M. & Shirreff E., (1872), *Thoughts on Self-Culture*, London, Simkin Marshall, pp. 181-183)

Harriet Martineau portrayed her spinster state in a highly favourable light, though at the same time implied skilfully that it was her own inadequacy rather than the state of marriage, that made her different from other women. In her *Autobiography*, after describing the details of her short-lived betrothal, she went on to celebrate the advantages of her single state.

If I had had a husband dependent on me for his happiness, the responsibility would have made me wretched...But through it all, I have been ever thankful to be alone. My strong will, combined with anxiety of conscience, makes me fit only to live alone...My business in life has been to think and learn, and to speak out with absolute freedom what I have thought and learned. The freedom is itself a positive and never-failing enjoyment to me, after the bondage of my early life. My work

and I have been fitted to each other, as is proved by the success of my work and my own happiness in it...I long ago came to the conclusion that...I am probably the happiest single woman in England.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 1, London, Smith, Elder and Co., pp. 99-102)

Harriet Martineau provides a very clear indication of the advantages of spinsterhood - independence, freedom, intellectual and career opportunities. These should be balanced against the well-publicised disadvantages - low social status, sexual and maternal non-fulfilment, poverty etc. She also implies that had she married, she would have been precluded from undertaking most of the activities which resulted in her successful career and sense of fulfilment. So, for Victorian middle-class women, the single state had considerable advantages, though the necessity for economic independence forced many into low paid and low status jobs, such as sewing and teaching. ⁽⁴⁴⁾ Others, like Harriet Martineau and some of those included in my survey of her female contemporaries, became writers - of journalism and popular fiction - and created new literary genres. For example, by the 1840s, especially in Britain and the United States, critics had come to recognise the 'domestic novel' as a specific genre, the consequence of the work mainly of women. Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook*, published in 1837, is one early example of this literary form. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

It thus appears that studies of the life experiences of single women such as Harriet Martineau can be of considerable value. They can, for any given historical period, provide interesting (and

alternative) perspectives on the condition of marriage. They can also offer illuminating glimpses of the nature and extent of female employment, and provide a more rounded picture of the state of women generally.

Gender and the Middle-Class in Nineteenth Century England

The influence of Harriet Martineau's class origins on her life and work are also of profound significance. Class dynamics and relationships were being reshaped during the period of her life, providing her with both the problems and benefits of being a member, albeit a female one, of a newly emerging order. Her origins were middle-class, non-conformist and provincial, and she was part of a powerful new class which emerged as a political force during the turbulent decades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in response to prolonged military campaigns, trade cycles and the near break down of the Poor Law.

Throughout the eighteenth century 'middling' groups tended to identify with the aristocracy and gentry, though they became increasingly separated on the basis of how they came to own property (commerce as opposed to inheritance), their value systems (Whig or Radical as opposed to Tory) and their non-conformity (Unitarian or Evangelical as opposed to Anglican). The French Revolution and its cry for liberty appealed to many, for example, William Cowper, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Wordsworth. At the same time, the machinations of the Regency Court signalled what was perceived as

the inevitable corruption of the aristocracy. However, there was a backlash against revolutionary ideas in the 1790s, when it was feared that the revolutionary movement would spread across the Channel. Then, middle-class radicals, such as Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), the Unitarian theologian and early hero of Harriet Martineau, were driven out of their non-conformist communities in London, Norwich and Sheffield. (46)

The conflict with France in the first decades of the nineteenth century proved a cultural watershed. The tumult, uncertainties and profits brought about by the Napoleonic Wars sharpened ideas about social convention and status. Interestingly, the idealised position of women was a central theme in nationalistic claims to English superiority advanced by conservatives and radicals alike. The effeminacy of the French was derided, and further underlined by the accusation that women had been used as soldiers in the French army. (47)

When the wars came to an end, people looked to a brighter future. Despite increased standards of living, waves of fever and cholera epidemics were never far away, and death from consumption was an ever present threat. So the middle classes determined to build their homes into havens of comfort, stability and morality, where women and children would be secure and protected. Harriet Martineau wrote of her own family, the following:

The remarkable feature of the family story, in those days, was the steady self-denial, and clear, inflexible purpose with

which the parents gave their children the best education which they could, by all honourable means, command. In those times of war and middle-class adversity, the parents understood their position, and took care that their children should understand it, telling them that there was no chance of wealth for them, and about an equal probability of a competence or of poverty.

(Martineau H., (1876), 'Obituary', Daily News, 29 June)

Middle class attitudes to work shifted from early nineteenth-century nostalgia for the artisan to mid-century commitment to market enterprise and commerce. Class gaps also widened in marriage and courtship patterns. The family life of working class women and men was often disrupted by diversity, with little community support and only Poor Law charity available when conditions became intolerable. On the other hand, middle-class family life prospered, bolstered by networks of family, kin and religion, and as revealed by Davidoff and Hall, families united in their devotion to countless philanthropic, religious and cultural activities. (48)

After the wars, and after considerable political struggle, the heads of middle-class households were eventually enfranchised by the Reform Act of 1832, significantly the first legislation explicitly to exclude women by its limitation of the franchise to 'male persons'. Middle-class interests were also predominant in the 1834 Poor Law, which Harriet Martineau helped to shape, (49) and in reforms to municipal government in 1835. Earlier, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 had removed civil disabilities from non-conformists, opening up possibilities for their wider participation in public life.

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802, the daughter of a Unitarian cloth manufacturer in Norwich. What is important here is that her life's philosophy and approach to work, reflected in her writing, can be traced back to her cultural and class origins. Individual effort, responsibility, and '*laissez-faire*-ism' in commercial and trade policies, formed the basis of her political platform. Yet she was also a firm advocate of the joys of domesticity and celebrated the value of family life, even though she was a single woman.

No true woman, married or single, can be happy without some sort of domestic life:- without having somebody's happiness dependent on her; and my own ideal of an innocent and happy life was a house of my own among poor improvable neighbours, with young servants whom I might train and attach to myself.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 2, London, Smith, Elder & Co., p. 225)

However, as Davidoff and Hall point out, gender and class operate together and class consciousness always takes a gendered form. ⁽⁵⁰⁾ In a new world where the middle classes divided the world into public and private spheres, Harriet Martineau tried to adapt her Victorian Radical perspective to accommodate her own life experiences. This led, in my view, to her adoption of women's issues as part of her political commitment, thus setting her apart from many of her Radical male contemporaries, such as James Mill and Jeremy Bentham. ⁽⁵¹⁾ So, not only did she advocate state non-intervention in industrial affairs, but she also promoted an advanced feminist programme. She argued, for example, that:

- * women should keep their property after marriage, and any income that they earned during marriage,
- * marriage was primarily an economic contract and that if it broke down, divorce should be cheap and easy to attain,
- * economic independence, a state to be desired, was a priority for many women,
- * all occupations and professions should be open to women,
- * girls and women of all classes should receive the same education as that provided for boys and men.

These demands were the consequence of her class *and* her sex. If she had been working class rather than middle class, her demands would have been different. ⁽⁵²⁾

Interestingly, where gender and class interests conflicted, for example, in extending factory legislation to protect women and children (as in the case of the Ten Hours Act in 1847) gender occasionally won out and, as I show in the next chapter, she advocated extension of the legislation. So, even though she has been described by Battiscombe as the 'high priestess' of *laissez-faire*, ⁽⁵³⁾ her perceptions as a woman, on occasions, over-rode her declared political affiliations.

Harriet Martineau's feminist stance suggests that women with progressive social and/or political views, whatever their class, will be likely to embrace feminism ⁽⁵⁴⁾, in some form or other, at some time in their careers or lives. In other words, if women are

concerned to bring about social or political change generally, they are also likely to take an interest in addressing the particular injustices heaped upon their own sex.

Female Bluestocking or Auxiliary Intellectual?

To portray Harriet Martineau as a reform-minded, Victorian, middle-class spinster would leave out one crucial element. She was also an intellectual. Watching, reading and deciphering the social, cultural and political signs of her time constituted the basis of her career. Yet, the specific characteristics of the nineteenth century woman intellectual, that set her apart from other women and men of her time, are difficult to define.

Generally, intellectuals have been characterised by cultural historians in ways which exclude women such as Harriet Martineau. Benda (55) and Mannheim (56), for example, argued that intellectuals should maintain detached and morally instructive relationships with their society, unfettered by class affiliations. Mannheim further suggested that education forms a unifying sociological bond between groups of intellectuals in that they all share a common educational heritage; and that modern intellectuals should regard intellectual practice as a vocation.

Others perceived intellectuals as inevitably at odds with the *status quo* of their society. Shils (57) hypothesised that it was when intellectuals became detached from their original function and

ceased to be 'solely bearers of religiosity', that tensions were created between intellectuals and religious authority. Himmelfarb, in her collection of essays entitled *Victorian Minds*, published in 1968, ⁽⁵⁸⁾ characterised the authentic intellectual as a man who feels himself a foreigner and outsider, in some way or other. And Gouldner ⁽⁵⁹⁾ suggested that intellectuals, together with the technical intelligentsia, were in the process of forming themselves into a new class, to challenge existing dominant social groupings. In his view, intellectuals are neither passionately alienated from dominant beliefs, nor do they necessarily legitimate them. They are mainly concerned with maintaining themselves as a class, which reproduces itself at a faster rate as literacy grows.

Theories about intellectuals, whether prescriptive like those of Benda and Mannheim, or descriptive as in the case of Himmelfarb and Gouldner, offer little help in finding a satisfactory location for women intellectuals of the nineteenth century, such as Harriet Martineau or George Eliot. These women were active in maintaining, rather than disassociating themselves, from class, cultural and gender attachments. They shared no common educational heritage with their male contemporaries, and little with their female peers either. To choose the pursuit of the intellect as a vocation was clearly problematic - since women's 'natural' vocation was deemed to be that of motherhood, or failing that, in a 'caring' role or profession. Moreover, women's subordinate status and difficulty in moving out of the private sphere made their participation in Gouldner's neo-intellectual class problematic.

Himmelfarb's theory, however, is of some help, though she did not refer specifically to women. Women intellectuals must have frequently felt 'outsiders' since they could play no active part in creating the 'alert' and 'responsible' masculine culture described by Young as characteristic of early Victorian England. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ On the other hand, women's 'distance' provided them with a particularly illuminating perspective on social and cultural life, as is evident in the writing of the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot.

Antonio Gramsci, the twentieth century Marxist theoretician, has more to offer in this context, though again he did not specifically mention women in his theories. Gramsci had a strong interest in the functioning of intellectuals in culture and society, and in particular in their contribution to change. He distinguished two types of intellectual; *traditional* and *organic*. According to Gramsci, every class needs to create one or more strata of intellectuals 'which gives it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields'. ⁽⁶¹⁾

He argued that intellectuals do not form a class but each class has its own intellectuals. Accordingly, every rising class finds categories of intellectuals already in place. These *traditional* intellectuals represent a historical continuity and provide the ideological foundation for the existing order, though they often characterise themselves as autonomous and independent of the ruling

class. Gramsci further argued that one of the most important goals of any emerging class is to conquer, ideologically, the traditional intellectuals. The crucial function exercised by *organic* intellectuals is, thus, to accompany any social group in its rise to power and provide ideologically, 'homogeneity' for, and 'awareness' of, the new regime.

Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an elite of intellectuals. A human mass does not "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders.

(Gramsci A., (1971), Selection from Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Hoare Q. & Nowell Smith G., London, Lawrence & Wishart, p.334)

Gramsci emphasised the passive, elaborative nature of intellectual work in highly developed societies, which could involve, as organic intellectuals, scholars, writers, men of letters, and any others who participate in the transmission of ideas,

How do Gramsci's ideas illuminate the position of nineteenth century women intellectuals? David suggests that women such as Harriet Martineau and George Eliot were organic intellectuals by virtue of their 'daughterly intellectual affiliation' to, and formidable support for, the English middle class. ⁽⁶²⁾ However they were also weighed down by an 'ancilliary' identity. As women they were subordinate to the robust male culture of middle-class society and were regarded by it as marginal, eccentric and effete. So, on the

one hand, together with their middle-class, male contemporaries, women intellectuals provided 'awareness' and 'homogeneity' to an increasingly powerful social class, performing functions of legitimation and elaboration for influential class ideologies. On the other hand, dominant ideological beliefs, characterised by Ruskin's popular volume *Sesame and Lilies* (63) proved hostile to their very existence, as independent thinking women. For example, the Victorian art critic, Hamerton, held that intellectual women simply could not exist because of the incapacity of the female sex to conduct any form of authentic intellectual life. 'Their [women's] remarkable incapacity for independent mental labour is accompanied by an equally remarkable capacity for labour under accepted masculine guidance'. (64)

These highly sexist, dominant, nineteenth-century ideological assumptions about the abilities of women contributed to the eventual restriction of women intellectuals to 'auxiliary useful' positions within the male-dominated culture. In Harriet Martineau's case:

her elaborative 'auxiliary usefulness' was diffused and unannounced, part of the complex cultural processes whereby hegemonic ideologies are disseminated through institutions such as the press, the church schools and universities rather than coercively imposed on society...

She may be said to feminise the function of Gramsci's category of organic intellectual production by intensifying its defining mark of acquiescent labour, a quality conventionally associated with Victorian women in the separation by sex and gender into public and private spheres.

(David D., (1987), *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy; Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot*, Basingstoke, Macmillan. p. 31)

In my view, the development of Gramscian theory as depicted above, provides explanatory possibilities for why Harriet Martineau was portrayed as a 'miscellaneous writer' (by Leslie Stephen in the Dictionary of National Biography) ⁽⁶⁵⁾ and as a journalist and a populariser of the work of Smith, Mill, Ricardo and Comte, rather than as a creator and developer of new social and economic theories. She was clearly capable of the latter, as her writing on the 'Woman Question' indicates. However, I have no doubt that she saw her 'auxiliary usefulness' as a key factor of her work. In her Daily News obituary, which she herself wrote some twenty years earlier, she summarised her intellectual contribution as follows:

Her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say. In short, she could popularise, while she could neither discover or invent. She could sympathize in other people's views, and was too facile in doing so; and she could obtain and keep a firm grasp of her own, and, moreover, she could make them understood.

(Martineau H., (1876), 'Obituary', Daily News, 29 June.)

In any case, she played the auxiliary part from the first to the last. As we shall see, her career began with the publication of her *Illustrations of Political Economy* series in 1832, and ended with a long association, as journalist, with the *Daily News*.

In summary, a number of arguments have been put forward in this chapter to support the adoption of Harriet Martineau as a case-study. First, because she was a woman, a study of her life and work can help illuminate the position of women and the extent of sexual divisions in England in the early Victorian period. Second, as a single woman, the examination of her (and other's) defence of the unmarried state gives us a deeper understanding of the prevailing assumptions about marriage during that period. Third, as an 'auxiliary intellectual' representing the more progressive elements of the newly emerging middle-class, Harriet Martineau offers us a feminist insight into nineteenth century radical ideas and radical politics.

Chapter 2 puts flesh on some of the issues raised in this chapter, by surveying Harriet Martineau's work as a writer and activist. It considers, in some detail, a variety of areas in which she has made important contributions, and attempts to provide an indication of the full range and depth of her achievements.

NOTES

1. Tuttle L., (1987), *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, London, Arrow Books
2. Hill C., (1975), *The World Turned Upside Down*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
3. Hufton O., (1983), 'Women and History: 1. Early Modern Europe', *Past and Present*, 101, pp. 125-141.
4. Beard M. (1946), *Women as Force in History*, 1986 edn., New York, Octagon.
5. Smith B. G., (1984), 'The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France and the United States 1750-1940', *The American Historical Review*, 89, 3, June, pp. 709-732.
6. Catherine Macauley's writing on women is discussed in Spender D., (1982), *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 94-100.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 720.
8. Beard, (1946), *op cit.*, pp. 341-369.
9. De Stael G., (1871), 'De l'esprit des traductions', in *Oeuvres Completes*, 2, quoted in Smith, (1984), *op cit.* p. 712.
10. Sarah Austin translated Ranke's *The Ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (London, 1840) and his *History of the Reformation* (London, 1845-7), in addition to Victor Cousin's *Report of the State of Public Instruction in Prussia* (New York, Effingham Wilson, 1834).
11. Cecilia M. Ady translated Benedetto Croce's *A History of Italy 1871-1915* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929)
12. Harriet Martineau translated Auguste Comte's *Philosophie Positive* (London, 1853)
13. Clemence Royer translated Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* (Paris, 1862)
14. Mary L. Booth translated Edouard Laboulaye's *Laboulaye's Fairy Book*, (1920 edn., New York, Harper & Bros.).
15. Carlyle T., (1857), *The Collected Works*, London, Chapman Hall.
16. The series *Famous Women*, published by Robert Roberts in Boston in the 1880s was republished in England by William Allen as the *Eminent Women* series. The following volumes were included in both: Blind M., (1883), George Eliot; Robinson M., (1883), Emily Bronte; Thomas B., (1883), George Sand; Gilchrist A., (1883), Mary Lamb;

Ward Howe J., (1883), Margaret Fuller; Zimmern H., (1883) Maria Edgeworth; Pitman E. R., (1884) Elizabeth Fry; Lee V., (1884), The Countess of Albany; Pennell E. R., (1884), Mary Wollstonecraft; Blind M., (1886), Madame Roland; Miller F., (1884), Harriet Martineau; and Duffy B., (1887), Madame de Stael.

17. Sutton Castle C., (1913), A Statistical Study of Eminent Women, New York, Science Press.

18. Smith, op cit., p. 715.

19. Schenk C., (1983), 'All of a Piece: Women's Poetry and Autobiography', in Brodzki B., (ed.), *Life/Lines, Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, Cornell University Press. Celeste Schenk argues about the patriarchal nature of boundary maintenance of genres thus:
Certain forms of women's poetry and autobiography can be read coextensively, in a manner that profitably destabilizes theory of mainstream autobiography and calls into question the patriarchal determination of genre theory more generally...The law of genre, the enforcement of generic purity, the policing of borders, has remained since the classical period a preoccupation of *homo* (properly understood man) *taxonomicus*.

20. Hill G., (1896), *Women in English Life from Medieval to Modern Times*, 2 vols., London, Bentley & Son; Power E., (1922), *Medieval English Nunneries*, Cambridge, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought.

21. Gamble E. B., (1894), *Evolution of Women: an Inquiry into the Dogma of her Inferiority to Men*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons; Putnam E., (1910), *The Lady: Studies of Certain Significant Phases of her History*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons; Grimshaw, op cit.

22. Stopes C. C., (1894), *British Freewomen: Their Historical Privilege*, London, Swann Sonnenschein.

23. Gunn P., (1964), *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget 1856-1935*, London, Oxford University Press.

24. Ray Strachey wrote a number of books on women including: (1928), *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement*, 1979 edn., London, Virago Press; (1931), *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, London, John Murray; (1936), *Our Freedom and its Results by Five Women*, London, Hogarth Press.

25. Beard, (1946), op cit., p. 10.

26. Beard M., (1931), *On Understanding Women*, New York, Longman's & Co.; Beard M., (1933), *America Through Women's Eyes*, New York, Macmillan.

27. Smith, op cit., p. 726.

28. Kelly-Gadol J., (1987), 'The social relation of the sexes: methodological implications of women's history', in: Harding S., (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, p. 15.
29. Harding S., (1987), 'Introduction: is there a feminist method?', in: Harding S., (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, pp. 1-14. Harding argues that in order to understand women's activities, feminist researchers first tried to 'add on' women to conventional analyses:
There were three kinds of women who appeared as obvious candidates for this process: women social scientists, women who contributed to the public life social scientists already were studying, and women who had been victims of the most egregious forms of male dominance. (p. 4)
30. Riley D., (1988), *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.
31. Redstockings, (1970) *Redstocking Manifesto*. New York, Redstockings; Firestone S., (1971), *The Dialectics of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*, 1979 edn., London, The Women's Press.
32. Mitchell J., (1971), *Women's Estate*, Harmondsworth, Penguin; Rowbotham S., (1973) *Hidden From History*, London, Pluto Press.
33. See also Mitchell J., (1966), *Women: the Longest Revolution*, 1984 edn., London, Virago Press.
34. Engels F., (1884), *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1942 edn., New York, International Publishers. Engels saw the monogamous marriage as the equivalent of capitalism, and sex as the equivalent of class, declaring that within the family (which was founded on domestic slavery of the wife), the husband was the bourgeois and the wife the proletarian.
35. Eisenstein H., (1984), *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, London, Unwin Paperbacks.
36. Kelly-Gadol, *op cit.*
37. Davidoff L. and Hall C., (1987), *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, London, Hutchinson, pp. 28-35.
38. Rendall J., (1985), *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the United States*, Basingstoke, Macmillan. This volume reproduces two Daumier cartoons originally created for Punch (1848 and 1850-2) which satirised and caricatured the activities of feminists in Britain and in France.
39. Davidoff and Hall, *op cit.*, pp 312-313.
40. Rendall, *op cit.*, pp 229-230

41. See, for example, Branca P., (1975), *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, London, Croom Helm.
42. See, for example, Levine P., (1987), *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900*, London, Hutchinson.
43. Banks O., (1986), *Becoming a Feminist: the Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf Books
44. See, for example, Peterson J. M., (1972), 'The Victorian Governess: status incongruence in family and society' and Roberts H. E. 'Marriage, Redundancy or Sin: the painter's view of women in the first twenty-five years of Victoria's reign' both in: Vicinus M. (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, pp. 3-19 & 45-76.
45. Martineau H., (1839), *Deerbrook*, London, Edward Moxon.
46. Rutt J. T., (1817-24), (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, London, published through subscription. Priestley's reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) led to the destruction of Priestley's house in Birmingham in 1791. From there he moved to Hackney and then to Pennsylvania, North America, where his particular form of radicalism was better received.
47. Moers E., (1960), *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm*, London, Secker & Warburg.
48. Davidoff and Hall, *op cit.*, p. 32.
49. Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 1, London, Smith, Elder & Co., pp. 221-225.
50. Davidoff and Hall, *op cit.*, p. 28-35
51. Mcarthur J. N., (1985), 'Utilitarians and the woman problem', *The Social Science Journal*, 22, 3, July, pp. 57-70. Mcarthur compares the philosophy of John Stuart Mill with those of James Mill and Jeremy Bentham. She concludes that their different stances, all adopted with a view to utility, were based on three different views of the process by which an individual identifies personal interest with common good. Only those Utilitarians, she argues, who believed their interests as males merged with those of the female half of the species were motivated to argue for reform of the legal and social status of women.
52. See, for example, Chew A. N., (1982) *Ada Neild Chew: the Life and Writings of a Working Woman*, London, Virago Press; Levine, *op cit.*
53. Battiscombe G., (1974), *Shaftesbury - a Biography of the Seventh Earl 1801-1885*, London, Constable, p. 168.

54. Rossi A., (1974), 'Introduction', in: Rossi A., (ed.) *The Feminist Papers: Adams to De Beauvoir*, New York, Bantam, pp. xii-xiii. The term 'feminism' did not come into use until the 1890s when it replaced 'womanism' to denote belief in sexual equality and support for movements for women's rights. Rossi dates the first usage of 'feminism' in print form to a book review published in *The Athenaeum*, 27 April 1895.
55. Benda J., (1928), *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, 1969 edn., translated by R. Aldington, New York, W. W. Norton.
56. Mannheim K., (1954), *Ideology and Utopia: an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, translated Wirth L. & Shils E., New York, Harcourt Brace.
57. Shils E., (1972), 'The Intellectuals and the Powers' and Other Essays, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 17.
58. Himmelfarb G., (1968), *Victorian Minds*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
59. Gouldner A. W., (1979), *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.
60. Young G. M., (1936), *Portrait of an Age*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 187.
61. Gramsci A., (1971), *Selection from Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Hoare Q. & Nowell Smith G., London, Lawrence and Wishart, p. 5.
62. David D., (1987), *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, p. 6
63. Ruskin J., (1864), *Sesame and Lilies*, 1908 edn., Newport, J. E. Southall. This volume contains two lectures delivered by Ruskin in Manchester in 1864. The second, 'Of Queens' Gardens' is specifically devoted to the appropriate role of women.
64. Hamerton P. G., (1891), *The Intellectual Life*, Boston, Mass., Roberts, p. 240, quoted in David, op cit., p. 17.
65. Stephen L. & Lees S. (eds.), (1882), 'Harriet Martineau', *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1921-2 edn., London, Oxford University Press, pp. 1194-9.

CHAPTER 2

HARRIET MARTINEAU: A SURVEY OF HER WORK

Harriet Martineau has been, 'claimed' historically on the basis of her achievements as a political economist, producing in 1834 the first popular text on the subject, *Illustrations of Political Economy*; an educational reformer campaigning on a wide range of issues; an early feminist, ever interested in the 'Woman Question'; one of the first sociologists particularly noted for her translation of Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive*; contemporary historian, an important source for Halevy's *A History of the English People* in 1815: and, according to George Eliot, the first woman journalist of note. Additionally she is famed as an autobiographer, novelist and writer of children's books - and to a lesser extent, as a traveller and champion of the disabled. It could be argued that achievements in such a diverse range of subjects is enough to guarantee her place in the history books. However, as we shall see in chapter 3, some commentators have equated this range of interests with mediocrity.

This chapter documents Harriet Martineau's achievements through the identification of eight distinct areas of her work, chosen for their relevance to the concerns of today; political economy, education, journalism, sociology, history, autobiography, literature and the 'Woman Question'. Because my perspective is that of a British feminist writing at the beginning of the 1990s,

I dedicate considerable space to Harriet Martineau's position on women, an aspect of her work omitted from the long biographical article about her by Leslie Stephen in the Dictionary of National Biography. ⁽¹⁾

Political Economy

Harriet Martineau came to prominence as a political economist, or rather as a presenter of economic principles. Political economy was already a powerfully influential discourse when she began writing about it in the 1830s. It had emerged in the 1820s as an intellectual response to the rapid shifts in class relations following the Napoleonic Wars. These shifts in class forces achieved, within a space of fifteen years, the 1832 Reform Act, the 1834 Poor Law and the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and were, according to Dentith, ⁽²⁾ all decisively influenced by arguments derived from political economy. It is therefore probable that aspects of economics were much discussed in the intellectual atmosphere of the Martineau family home in Magdalene Street, Norwich.

It has been suggested that the economic problems of the Martineau family in Norwich provided a personal incentive for Harriet Martineau to take up political economy as a campaigning issue. ⁽³⁾ That is, perhaps, only part of the story. A more likely explanation is that the theories espoused by political economists reflected her own class interests as the daughter of a factory

owner and also her interests as a member of a dissenting group - the Unitarians.

Whatever her reasons, in 1830, two years before the publication of the first of the famous *Illustrations of Political Economy*, Harriet Martineau emphasised the importance of studying political economy, given, she wrote, that the science was hardly known. Hence, if people wanted reform, they had to begin by informing themselves - by learning the principles of political economy. ⁽⁴⁾ This she set out to encourage in the form of illustrative political economy tales, a medium pioneered by Jane Marcet in her volume *Conversations on Political Economy*, published in 1816. ⁽⁵⁾ Mrs. Marcet used only two fictitious characters to bring the subject to life: the pupil, Caroline, and her teacher, Mrs. B. Harriet Martineau was more ambitious, producing eye-catching storylines and fleshed out characters so successfully, that contemporaries sometimes read them for their fictional qualities alone, as we shall see in chapter 4.

Despite difficulties in getting the series published (according to the *Autobiography*, James Mill advised the publisher that Harriet's plan 'could not possibly succeed' ⁽⁶⁾) it was an instantaneous, popular success. The stories were first published individually (from February 1832 onwards), and later were reprinted in nine volumes, most of which contained three stories of approximately one hundred and thirty pages each. In the end, ten thousand copies were sold in Great Britain and America: the

ten thousand copies were sold in Great Britain and America: the series was a best seller.

The stories were constructed round James Mill's classic principles of political economy: Production, Exchange, Distribution, and Consumption of Wealth. ⁽⁷⁾ The message of the stories was made palatable with the use of intriguing titles and chapter headings such as French Wine and Politics and Cinnamon and Pearls, intended to attract the lay reader to the tales. ⁽⁸⁾ Harriet Martineau made use of the standard works on political economy then available including Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) and James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1821-2), as well as contemporary news items for the story settings. ⁽⁹⁾ The twenty-five stories in the *Illustrations* were followed immediately by five others entitled *Illustrations of Taxation* and a series of four, commissioned by the Society for the Dissemination of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), entitled *Poor Laws and Paupers, Illustrated*. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Favourite theses of the classical economists were reflected in her work. She advocated Adam Smith's doctrine of the harmony of interests, the Malthusian principle of overpopulation as the basic cause of many social ills, and Ricardian proposals favouring free trade based on comparative advantage. Each leading political economy principle was embodied in a character.

For example, in Demerara the fourth tale written in 1833, the son of a plantation owner returns to the West Indies from Britain where he has learnt about political economy. The young man has been told about the nature of invested capital and explains to the plantation owners that capitalists should strive to protect their capital and not destroy it. The son describes the different forms of labour and their value as he tries to gain better treatment for the slaves. Finally to the slaves, the young master divulges the essence of property rights, concluding with the statement 'man has no right to hold man in property'.

However, what made the stories so popular was that to keep the reader's attention sub-themes were introduced; in this instance concerning a rebellious slave family and the flight to freedom of one young runaway slave. The son tries to prove to the other plantation owners the benefits of wage labour, by compensating his own slaves for their efforts. As expected, productivity increases, but the environment is hostile to liberalisation and everyone is worse off than before. The plantation's troubles increase until the only hope available to stave off ruin is for the introduction of new business techniques based on the principles of political economy. In the end it is the fault of government and legislation, and ending slavery, an economic rather than an ethical issue. In the final words of the son:

Let us see, then, what is the responsibility of the legislature in this matter. The slave system inflicts an incalculable amount of human suffering, for the sake of making a wholesale waste of labour and capital.

Since the slave system is only supported by legislative protection, the legislature is responsible for the misery caused by direct infliction, and for the injury indirectly occasioned by the waste of labour and capital.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 4, London, Charles Fox, p. 143)

For Harriet Martineau, the principles of political economy needed to be *understood* if they were to work effectively for the benefit of all classes:

If it concerns the rulers that their measures should be wise, if it concerns the wealthy that their property should be secure, the middling classes that their industry should be rewarded, the poor that their hardships be redressed, it concerns all that Political Economy should be understood.

(Ibid., 1, p. xvi)

Harriet Martineau wrote about political economy at a time when 'economics was still in the chrysalis stage of development'. ⁽¹¹⁾ She chose the narrative form of exposition because she was convinced that it was the best form by which to teach the subject and because she deplored the dry obscurity of the economic treatises then available. She was also concerned about the effects on *people* of the science of economics, a concern that was shared by other women economists, as we shall see later.

We cannot see why the truth and its application should not go together, - why an explanation of the principles which regulate society should not be made more clear and interesting at the same time by pictures of what those principles are actually doing in communities

(Ibid., 1, p. xii)

However, her writing on political economy is also contradictory insofar as she was a consistent advocate of *laissez-faire* policies, yet at times, particularly later in her life, admitted to the necessity of legislation to alleviate the worst inadequacies of industrial labour conditions. Her writing also attempted to be at the same time, scientific and socially useful, arguably polarised concepts. Yet the philosophy of necessarianism saw the two as ultimately the same. Harriet Martineau drew on *necessarianism*, to argue for the need for individuals to make greater efforts to organise their lives in accordance with the natural laws of the universe, with the aim of achieving a form of organic economic and social harmony.

Briefly *necessarianism* contended that all action arises as a result of intentions. Intentions, in turn, are ultimately determined by external perceptions brought about by the law of association. Since all matter operates in obedience to natural laws, so the whole of moral and mental life, being a function of matter, is similarly subject to natural laws. (Harriet Martineau's interest in necessarianism is explored in more detail in chapter 4.)

Further, her commitment to nineteenth century radicalism enabled her to take a more independent line than some of her biographers allow. Some of the political economy tales vigorously challenged vested interests and monopoly privileges of her own class, the financial and manufacturing community, identifying numerous

social abuses within the existing order. Others, however, were aimed at economic ideas that she considered crucial for the working classes. She demonstrated, for example, the futility of striking and rioting since, 'the interests of the two classes of producers, Labourers and Capitalists are...the same; the prosperity of both depending on the accumulation of CAPITAL'.

(12)

Her self-assigned role was to improve the advantages of the social state, and she commanded considerable influence whether vigorously opposing government interference in industry, demanding a national education system or supporting direct taxation. Her adherence to the politically progressive wing of nineteenth century politics meant also that social issues were often uppermost in her concerns. Throughout her life she was committed to social reform. She also had some sympathy for early socialist ideas, such as those held by Robert Owen. She described him, on the one hand, as 'one of the clearest and most striking signs of our times', and possibly 'among the foremost of his generation', had he achieved power. (13) Yet, she also thought him misguided and narrow-minded: 'Robert Owen is not the man to think differently of a book for having read it; and this from no want of candour, but simply from more than the usual human inability to see anything but what he has made up his mind to see.' (14) She was also deeply critical of his leadership qualities and of his powers of judgement. (15)

Harriet Martineau advocated reform of the Poor Laws and believed, for example, that one way to improve the plight of the workers was to improve their housing. She translated her politics into practice in 1848, when she was instrumental in building thirteen grey stone cottages for her neighbouring farmworkers in Ambleside. Interestingly, at a time when trade unions were illegal, she took a firm stand on the rights of unions to exist, although, in her own view, their powers were to be firmly limited. This latter position, and other instances, for example, when, in 1847, she advocated industrial protection for child and female workers, constituted something of a break with the classic ideological approach of *laissez-faire* economics, with which she has so frequently been identified. (This is further explored in the section on journalism later in this chapter.)

Though Harriet Martineau's prose style appears somewhat stilted to the modern reader, the Illustrations proved to be, at the very least, a highly successful experiment in information dissemination. The series contributed to (and reflected) the huge popularity, among all classes, of economic (ie secular, 'worldly') ideas in the nineteenth century, even if, in its fictionalised treatment of some economic concepts, it oversimplified and blurred some highly complex sets of arguments.

Contemporary political economists, such as John Stuart Mill, were unsympathetic to Harriet Martineau's efforts in economic education. Mill accused her of reducing *laissez-faire* to 'an

absurdity' and called her a 'mere tyro'. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Mill's attack, however, may have been induced by the enormous popularity of Harriet Martineau's easily understood work compared to the relatively meagre sales of his later, more complex work *Principles of Political Economy* which appeared in 1848. Harriet Martineau, aware of the criticisms, defended herself with due modesty:

I have become much too awakened to the glory to dream of sharing the honour. Great men must have their hewers of wood and drawers of water; and scientific discoveries must be followed by those who will popularise their discoveries. When the woodman finds it necessary to explain that the forest is not of his planting, I may begin to particularize my obligation to Smith and Malthus, and others of higher order.

(Ibid., 25, p. 7)

Harriet Martineau was not the only woman political economist of the nineteenth century, though she is, perhaps, the best known. There were parallels between her treatment of the subject and several of her female contemporaries. All adopted 'auxiliary' status, as described in the last chapter, in that they were popularisers of economic ideas rather than producers of theory, and they were all, according to Thomson,

ardent free-enterprisers...Their ideology of individualism and the literary forms within which they working inspired them to purvey simple moral precepts. Economics, in their view, had a close kinship to the moral philosophy from which it derived

(Thomson D. L., (1973), *Adam Smith's Daughters*, New York, Exposition Press, pp. 3-4.)

It could therefore be argued that the role Harriet Martineau took as a translator and transmitter of ideas, rather than as an original thinker in the mould of Smith, Bentham or Mill, had rather more to do with her gender than commentators have given her credit for. Women were excluded from the creative dialogues and debates offered by male intellectual networks which formed the base for the development and generation of economic theory. Moreover, nineteenth century ideologies about women limited their spheres of activity, as we saw in the last chapter. To be an educator, whether as governess or writer, was far more acceptable as a female occupation than philosophy, science or invention, the latter three, however, being popular leisure activities for the Victorian, male middle class.

Education

Whilst she gained her initial reputation through the publication of the Illustrations, one of Harriet Martineau's most impressive achievements was as a reformer. She gave her support to numerous causes including a national system of education, equal education for girls and women, universal suffrage, Florence Nightingale's army reforms, and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Her campaigns around education exemplify, more fully than any other of her reform interests, the contradictions of her position as a Victorian radical.

Harriet Martineau's passionate interest in education from a relatively early age (she wrote her first article on the subject in 1823, at the age of 21 ⁽¹⁷⁾) was derived, in the first instance, from her Unitarian upbringing: and though she lost her faith later in life, the principles upon which she based her desire for widespread education remained unchanged.

Nineteenth-century Unitarians, such as Harriet Martineau, believed that education for both children and adults was essential if the natural laws of society were to be learnt and understood, and preparation made for a better society. Physical and intellectual training was seen as necessary for higher moral development and it was envisaged that this would make wives better employees, factory owners better employers and women, better wives and mothers. ⁽¹⁸⁾

Thus, the ethical aims of education were to be the learning of diligence, obedience, reverence and courage, good fellowship, pity for the weak, and admiration of the lofty. More practically, according to Harriet Martineau in 1832, 'the purpose of education is to put children in the way of improvement by training as to the moral department, and by the mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic in the intellectual.' ⁽¹⁹⁾

However for the poor, education was to be largely 'industrial':

this, which is necessary for the strengthening of the body, the cultivation of the senses, and the enlivening of the mind... all important to moral discipline. A really good industrial training, various enough to suit the varieties of

pupils...would mitigate the evil from which a great deal of poverty and loose-living now arises.

(Martineau H., (1857), *Daily News*, 26 May, p. 4)

Harriet Martineau articulated orthodox Unitarian doctrine when she maintained that the central pre-requisites for universal suffrage were a sound education for all classes, solid discipline and an understanding of the natural laws of political economy.

In the 1830s and 1840s she advocated a national system of education on the grounds that the 'ignorant' classes would become more malleable. She wrote in the *Monthly Repository* in 1832, for example, that 'a provision for their education being once established, the people, whose interests are now so difficult to manage, would be converted into co-operators with the government, as long as the government is worthy of that co-operation.' (20) She also criticized the existing system of parliamentary grants for offering support for existing educational initiatives rather than extending provision to working-class children.

In the next two decades she looked more closely at the school curriculum, coming to the conclusion that vocational as well as intellectual training was vital: 'the cordial shaking hands with nature, in industrial training, is as good for the intellect as books are for the expansion of the moral as well as the intellectual part of man'. (21) She took an independent stance on educational matters, and welcomed the 1861 Revised Code of Robert Lowe which tied grants to examination results, on the

grounds of the needs of the state: 'henceforward the State Payments must be earned by the fulfillment of the aims of the State'. (22) She also believed that parents were far more likely to keep their children at school if they saw positive outcomes:

The one thing that parents of all degrees of intelligence can appreciate is the mastery of the three arts in question. The keenness of the desire on the part of parents of the labouring class that their children should read and write well, and cast accounts, is little understood by those who should know it.

(Martineau H., (1861), Daily News, 14 September)

Moreover, according to Harriet Martineau, payment by results would encourage teachers to offer a more thorough and practical form of schooling without, necessarily, narrowing the curriculum available. As a consequence, teachers' professional status would be enhanced: 'they [teachers] will find themselves occupying a higher place than at present'. (23)

In general, Harriet Martineau's views on education reflected her Unitarian and non-conformist origins. She advocate secular education. Religious freedom was to be protected by a local rating system for school funding, and additional finance could also be gained from drawing on existing public charity funds. She was also a powerful advocate of 'progressive' schooling, wholly opposed, for example, to rote learning and reward systems. 'There will be no reward and punishment at all;...human beings

will be so trained as to find their pleasure and pain in the gratification or the abuse of their own highest faculties.' (24)

She also had a horror of corporal punishment, describing, in 1854, the public schools' use of 'flogging and fagging' as a 'system based on brute force and despotism'. As a tyranny similar to slavery, she predicted its downfall. 'All such tyrannies are doomed; and none more surely than that which is built upon unregenerate passions, secured by aristocratic usage and convenience, and disguised by a haze of pseudo-religious sentiment.' (25)

Her insistence on the involvement of industry in the schooling process has a modern flavour. She was an advocate of industrial training for children of all classes as attractive to employers, a source of pride to parents, and as a new perspective for, what she termed, old-fashioned educators. (26) To encourage this, she urged factory owners both to make education a prerequisite for employment and to release child-workers for periods of schooling. 'We do not see why they [the employers] should not establish a public opinion among their workmen, forbidding the employment of children under a certain age, or for so many hours in the day as to interfere with school instruction.' (27)

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Her views on *working class* education, culled from the Daily News leaders, can briefly be summarised as follows. She:

- * supported a national system of education for the working class to be state financed and run.
- * opposed the Monitorial system as too dreary and dependent on rote learning.
- * supported industrial training and a relevant curriculum
- * suggested that the school curriculum should include the 3Rs, industrial and manual training and oral work.
- * added that girls' education should similarly comprise the 3Rs, 'common things', and household skills.
- * advocated that infant schools should be less didactic and increase their use of oral methods.
- * supported the Revised Code as parents were far more likely to keep their children at school if they saw clear progress.
- * criticised the administration of the same tests to girls and boys, even though only the girls spent a quarter of their time at school on sewing activities.
- * supported working women's colleges on the grounds that vocationally trained women would get better paid jobs.
- * advocated the provision of general education classes for women who wished to improve themselves.

As for *middle class* education, Harriet Martineau concentrated much more on the experiences of her own sex. However she had

some general points to make. These are again taken from her Daily News leaders. She:

- * supported the reform of public school endowments and the investigation of all charitable trusts.
- * complained that many endowments originally made for girls as well as boys now excluded girls eg Christ's Hospital.
- * opposed corporal punishment for being despotic and brutal.
- * criticised public schools as 'connexion' networks rather than institutions of learning.
- * approved the establishment of the Taunton Commission (1864-7) to investigate the current state of middle-class schooling, though argued that it should include girls' schools as well as boys'. (She also suggested that the commissioners appointed to examine girls' schools should already be familiar with the issues surrounding female education.)

Many other Unitarians also held advanced views on female education and it is concerning this aspect of education that Harriet Martineau is best known. Since the development of intellectual powers, physical health and moral vigour were all seen by Unitarians as interdependent and of need of cultivation from infancy, women (as future wives and mothers) required a full education in all these spheres. (28) This posed a sharp contrast to the prevailing views of the early nineteenth century which dictated that women had no need of education, and indeed held

that the cultivation of the female intellect posed a threat to childbearing and 'true' womanhood. (29)

Harriet Martineau's approach to female education was in one sense traditional and yet at the same time decidedly advanced. She firmly located the ideal place for women as in the home and frequently described their 'natural' occupations as wives and mothers. Accordingly, she advocated a form of female education which would both extend their thought processes and advance their domestic skills.

Nevertheless, she recognized that many women were unable to meet that 'feminine ideal' and, like herself, for reasons beyond their control, were obliged to enter the workforce. In an important article entitled 'Female Industry' in 1859, she drew on the 1851 census figures to show that there were considerably more women than men of marriageable age: and, therefore, that women ought to be educated in preparation for work. (30) She described specific vocational training appropriate for different types of female employment, yet still emphasized the importance of intellectual attainment. Quoting from a letter sent by a headmistress describing the virtues of her school which took in girls from the shopkeeping and artisan classes, she wrote:

I think myself very fortunate in having a mistress so capable of teaching the higher branches of knowledge and yet so anxious to give an interest to all home and useful

duties. The idea of *taking pleasure* in cutting out their own clothes, washing etc. seems so new to the children.

(Martineau H., (1859), 'Female Industry', *Edinburgh Review*, 222, p. 319)

Whilst she focused at some length on the importance of female education for the working classes - to counter drunkenness, child destitution and wife beating, and to provide employment opportunities (for example, in a *Daily News* leader in 1855 ⁽³¹⁾) Harriet Martineau was most persuasive (and often most scathing) about the educational practices of her own class. She was highly critical of the state of contemporary, middle-class female education and though she acknowledged that it had improved since the turn of the century, was utterly condemnatory of its main institution - the young ladies' academy. Here girls were taught 'fashionable' accomplishments eg fine handwriting and drawing, 'badly' by visiting tutors, and were, for example, often left to invent their own names and locations for European capitals rather than receiving proper tuition. Moreover, living conditions were likely to be insanitary since it was quite common, she reported in 1864, to see 'half a dozen of them crammed into a bedroom for two; and...[washing] their feet all round on a Saturday night with a limited supply of water and towels'. ⁽³²⁾

In the same article, she argued that the chief difficulty in achieving educational advancement for girls was that, whereas, the reform of boys' schools had the foundation of tradition on which to build, no such tradition existed for girls. While there

was a general concensus that all boys required schooling of some sort, in the case of girls, fashion held sway and there was 'no tradition, no common conviction, no established method, no imperative custom, - nothing beyond a supposition that girls must somehow learn to read and write, and to practise whatever accomplishment may be the fashion of the time'. (33)

Harriet Martineau was quite clear about the contents of a suitable education for middle-class girls. She advocated a broad, liberal curriculum which would include philosophy, French, history and English literature for the expansion of reading and general intelligence; handwriting, arithmetic and book-keeping for an understanding of the 'business of life'; natural history to provide a background for certain domestic activities such as gardening and poultry-rearing; and household education for domestic responsibilities. She was also a firm advocate of physical education in the hope that it would improve the health of the 'pale-faced, languid, crooked, fretful type of schoolgirl, we now have before our eyes', and committed to classical and mathematical education as a means of training the faculties. (34)

For girls from the 'humbler ranks' of the middle class - the daughters of shopkeepers, farmers and artisans - she advocated a rather more domestic education 'such as cutting out, making, and mending their clothes, sweeping and cleaning the house, and cooking and setting out plain dinners'. However, it would also

include 'strikingly' good arithmetic, and 'intelligence of conversation'. (35)

Although she acknowledged that marriage and motherhood was to be the likely destination of most girls, regardless of class, Harriet Martineau was emphatic about the necessity for access to continuing and higher education to be extended to those young women who either wanted or needed qualifications or training for career advancement. She was a lifelong friend of Mrs. Reid, founder of Bedford College, and well into old age, remained informed about the latest advances in female higher education. Moreover, she held that no profession or career avenue should be closed to women, supporting a number of campaigns aimed at removing barriers preventing women from entering the careers of their choice.

She pleaded women's right to enter the field of medicine as early as 1854, (36) and in a Daily News leader in 1859, proposed the establishment of a female medical school.

The aim is to diffuse such hygienic knowlege as will prevent a great amount of disease [particularly among children]; and to afford the benefit of hospital treatment of the best kind by placing the patients under the charge of female physicians, who will have the advantage of consultation with a Board of Physicians and Surgeons.

(Martineau H., (1859), Daily News, 25 March)

In 1870, she petitioned parliament to admit women to the medical profession on equal terms to those of men, following with interest Sophia Jex Blake's battle with the University of Edinburgh. (37) Two years later, only four years before her death, she offered support for the organisation, Medical Education for Women, inaugurated to combat 'the injustice of the present arbitrary exclusion of women from the medical profession'. (38)

In summary, Harriet Martineau was a tireless advocate of the extension of education to all classes, believing that ignorance could only lead to social and political calamity. She was opposed to corporal punishment and systems of rewards, as we have seen, and clearly had an anti-authoritarian view of teaching and learning. For example, in her book Household Education, she wrote:

When a child wills what is right and innocent, let the faculty work freely. When it wills what is wrong and hurtful, appeal to other faculties, and let this one sleep; excite the child's attention; engage its memory, or its hope, or its affection.

(Martineau H., (1849), Household Education, London, Edward Moxon, p. 73)

Nevertheless, she had distinct views on what she thought children ought to gain from their schooling, related to the needs of the state, and commerce and industry. Despite her democratic claims for education, she remained staunchly Victorian in advocating

differentiated forms of schooling according to class. She was most advanced, however, in her demands for equality of educational opportunity for the girls and women of her own class. In this she was consistent throughout her lifetime from her earliest article on education in the *Monthly Repository* in 1823 (39) to one of her last leaders for the *Daily News* in January 1866. (40)

Journalism

Harriet Martineau is reputed to have been one of the first practising woman journalists in England, and, furthermore, according to George Eliot was 'the only woman in England who thoroughly possessed the art of writing.' (41)

However valid these claims may be, there can be little doubt that no other woman in Victorian England was so active in, or owed so much to, the profession of journalism. It sustained her economically and intellectually in the 1850s and 1860s and enabled her to write on a wide range of 'male' subjects ie those associated with public affairs. As a woman, journalism provided Harriet Martineau with unique opportunities to excel.

Harriet Martineau began writing as an unpaid contributor to W. J. Fox's Unitarian journal, the *Monthly Repository* in her twenties and later became a paid (albeit minimally) regular. As her career progressed, an impressive number of Victorian periodicals

published her work. These included Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, Chambers's Journal, Penny Magazine, Westminster Review, Edinburgh Review, Household Words, People's Journal, The Leader, Macmillan's Magazine, The Cornhill Magazine, and Once a Week. In addition she wrote for the American journals Atlantic Monthly and National Anti-Slavery Standard. But writing for periodicals was not the only form of journalism open to her.

Her finest journalistic accomplishment was her contributions to the liberal newspaper, the Daily News. Her friend and executor Maria Weston Chapman reported that between 1852 and 1866, Harriet Martineau supplied that paper with 1,642 leaders. ⁽⁴²⁾ Most of these, though unsigned, were identified in 1959 in Webb's unpublished Handlist of Contributions to the *Daily News* by Harriet Martineau. ⁽⁴³⁾

Harriet Martineau was a professional writer. From the time of the collapse of the Martineau family income in the 1820s, she lived by the pen, and in the main, did so fairly successfully. She never made huge amounts of money but she managed her finances effectively by investing wisely and, at times, living frugally. She remained on immensely good terms with most of the editors of the journals and newspapers for which she wrote, probably because she was an editor's dream. Her manuscripts were neat and intelligible with almost no corrections or changes: and she was conscientious about getting her copy in on time, even so far as

to press Rowland Hill to provide a speedier mail service between Ambleside and London. (44)

Though sickness and ill health kept her housebound in Ambleside in the last decade of her life, Harriet Martineau's literary output was as impressive as ever in the 1850s and 1860s. She contributed to a number of popular journals. She wrote for Charles Dickens' Household Words from its first issues, on health and sanitation matters, and also produced a descriptive series on industrial matters. However, she later parted company with the journal over its anti-Catholic stance and over Dickens' portrayal of women. Her objections to the latter were expressed in very pointed terms: in modern parlance she took exception to Dickens' portrayal of women as sex-objects.

In the autumn of 1849, my misgivings first became serious. Mr. Willis [the assistant editor] proposed my doing some articles on the Employments of Women (especially in connection with the Schools of Design and branches of Fine-Art manufacture), and was quite unable to see that every contribution of the kind was necessarily excluded by Mr. Dickens's prior articles on behalf of his view of Woman's position; articles in which he ignored the fact that nineteen-twentieths of the women of England earn their bread, and in which he prescribes the function of Women; viz, to dress well and look pretty, as an adornment to the homes of men.

(Martineau H., (1877), Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, 2, London, Smith, Elder and Co., p. 419)

In 1850 and 1851 she wrote sketches for the Leader and Once a Week, and when short of money in 1864, wrote articles for The Cornhill Magazine and Edinburgh Review. However, periodical

writing merely punctuated her regular work for the *Daily News*. She started writing on Australian emigration in May 1852, and wrote continually until April 1866, bar a three month period in 1855 when she produced her *Autobiography*. At times she wrote as many as six leaders a week, particularly when the office was short-staffed in holiday time.

Her range of concerns was astonishingly wide. She always had 'half a hundred topics', she told Lord Carlisle, that she could write about if the occasion offered. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ Her subjects ranged over a wide field of foreign and domestic affairs. She gave her opinion, as we have seen in the other sections of this chapter, on political, social and economic conditions. She wrote about the war in Crimea and about imperial policy in Ireland, India and the colonies. She expressed her continued concern for education at all levels of society. She argued for improvements in public health and for political, legal and prison reform. She kept the question of slavery in America, almost single-handedly, in the public eye and was also, as we shall see, a lone voice on the 'Woman Question'.

On the *Crimean War*, for example, she offered her support to military engagement, motivated not by imperialism and expansionism but because she saw the Russian regime as an archetypical symbol of despotism. She genuinely feared the spread of oppressive Russian forces. However, she expressed scepticism about the ability of the British establishment to

mount a successful military offensive, and was appalled at what she saw as the mismanagement of the campaign, the hardships inflicted on the British soldiers, and the tragic neglect of the sick and wounded. She pronounced the army, as a good indication of national character; 'servile, passive,...reduced to single uniformity'. (46) She commended the valiant efforts of Florence Nightingale with whom she later, in 1859, had a fruitful collaboration over the publication, *England and her Soldiers*, an account of the inefficiencies of the Crimean War. She placed the blame squarely on the ruling class when she wrote about the war in a *Daily News* leader in 1855:

Our aristocracy have received their rebuke in their proved incapacity to manage our army...the results of our political tendencies have told disastrously on our organisation and management. In a country where the aristocracy has ever been the real ruling power, there is no hope for justice to the army but in constant warfare.

(Martineau H., (1855), *Daily News*, 6 December)

She also expressed strong opinions about *India* under imperial rule and also about the mutiny, which she had considered inevitable. She accepted the fact of the British presence in India but thought of the Empire in terms of improvement of colonial territories rather than aggrandisement and expansion of British interests. She believed that the impact of British imperialism had so far been disastrous: 'the arts and manufactures of India have been decaying ever since we landed there'. Moreover, the best ships carrying wood, ivory, carpets

and fabrics had been pillaged by the British. In fact, despite grants of money, the British presence had produced, in Madras for example, wretchedly poor people verging on the 'lowest ebb of pauperism'. (47)

Eventually, she believed, all dependencies would achieve independence, but in the meanwhile, India should be ruled by the British but according to Indian ideas and customs, and with the assistance of the Indians themselves.

We must go to business and that immediately - to get a well-compacted responsible government, organised for India, and laws that can work, and courts that can be confided in, and a power of control over war-makers, and a power of stimulating the arts and peace.

(Martineau H., (1853), Daily News, 7 June)

As her books *How to Observe* (1838) and *Eastern Life, Past and Present* (1848) (48) show, Harriet Martineau sought to preserve native culture against the processes of Anglicisation. She expressed concern at the folly of undermining the traditional Indian systems of land tenure, tax collection, and economy; and reported her distress at the blatant bias against appointing Indians to administrative positions. Hence, according to Pichanick, (49) she was too much of a democrat to approve of government by authoritarian and alien administration, whether it issued from the East India Company's offices in Leadenhall Street or from the government in Whitehall. (50)

She was also, as has already been noted, one of the most influential voices in the British press on the *abolition of slavery* and the *American Civil War*. 'It was Harriet Martineau alone...who was keeping English public opinion about America on the right side through the press', wrote W.E. Forster (1819-86), the Liberal parliamentarian. (51)

She kept her readers up to date with political and constitutional developments and explained the territorial struggle between the free and slave states. For Harriet Martineau, the slave question was the axis on which the destiny of America turned:

Every public movement in the United States is, and long has been, determined by the immediate condition of the slavery question; and the question supplies the whole group of tests by which the political conduct of every public man will necessarily be tried till the controversy is extinguished one way or another.'

('The United States under the Presidentship of Mr. Buchanan', p. 288, quoted in Pichanick V. K., (1981), *Harriet Martineau: the Woman and her Work 1802-1876*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, p. 214)

She argued, as she had in Demerara, that slave owners could not be 'effectual' champions of human freedom. However, in her *Daily News* leaders she prioritised ethical considerations above economics. For example, in 1854 she wrote that American slaves were 'an oppressed race of men who are shut down in dumbness and helplessness, and whose condition must be judged of, not according to the expediences of internal administration, but to the eternal principles of right and wrong.' (52) Further,

despite unwillingness to become involve in the internal affairs of the United States, the British could not ignore the 'privation of a race of men':

It is the height of absurdity to expect or to desire us to abet the cause of slave-holding by silence or indifference, after such a course of action as we have, as a people, pursued for half a century, with regard to other nations as slave-trading, and to ourselves when slave-holding.

(Martineau H., (1854), Daily News, 8 July)

She, thus, welcomed the start of the American Civil War and remained an unequivocal champion of the North. For her, it provided the opportunities both to end slavery once and for all, and to revise the Constitution without compromise or evasion.

Another subject to which Harriet Martineau turned repeatedly in her leaders were topics related to class interests. Her middle-class eye frequently turned to the conditions of the *working class*. During the cotton famine in the 1850s, she had helped to organise relief for unemployed Lancashire Operatives. She even suggested such forms of state welfare as soup kitchens, the provision of living accommodation in those areas where work was available, and temporary plots of land for the unemployed. (53)

By providing work for the unemployed - for example on worthwhile public projects like road building and drainage - instead of outright charity, she argued, the pride of honest men would be spared without offering succour to the idle. Pichanik suggests

that even this limited endorsement of government-sponsored work projects and soup kitchens created a major exception to the *laissez-faire* rule; particularly for one who was still fundamentally opposed to charity on the grounds that it encouraged improvidence, discouraged frugality and created a dependence on alms. (54)

As Harriet Martineau grew older she became increasingly interventionist and less scrupulously *laissez-faire*-ist. However, she was opposed to organised labour and to political power for trade unions, though she was happy for them to exist as a form of friendly society. She admitted, however, that because of the apparent tenacity of trade unionists, a natural law of organised labour might exist which had hitherto remained undiscovered.

The tendency to combination [has] been so constant as to point to a future time when some natural laws of organisation of labour will have been disclosed, and these arrangements will indicate themselves which will secure beyond dispute the benefit of all parties.

(Martineau H., (1853), Daily News, 28 June)

She still believed in Adam Smith's principle of identity of interests, and was thus hostile to strikes. Accordingly, it was against the interests of workers to strike: 'the employed should know, if they do not know, that now more than ever, their refusal to work is directly diminishing the demand for their labour.'

(55) Further, she issued the warning that withholding labour

could lead to unemployment: 'in the case of manufactures where machinery is employed the immediate effect of strikes is to stimulate the invention and use of machinery to supercede human labour.' She contended that workers and their employers should arrive at a shared understanding of their problems by means of mutual negotiation. (56)

Harriet Martineau was also opposed to much of the factory legislation of the mid-century, not because she had a callous disregard for the suffering of the worker but because she had faith in middle class employers, presumably because of her family background. She was convinced of their ultimate fair-mindedness and benevolence. However, she weakened with the passage of the Ten Hours Act in 1847, when she finally became convinced that long hours and unhealthy conditions were the rule in factories rather than the exception. The Act, she argued, should be extended to cover female and child labour in hitherto unregulated industries. She still clung to the principle of *laissez-faire* but reluctantly concluded that nineteenth century industrial relations were clearly not ideal.

It ought not to be an office of law to protect the operative from being overworked, deprived of sleep, and of time for meals, and of education; but it was worse to see operatives oppressed, as they too often were before the protection of law was provided for them...We have to extend this protection beyond its present range.

(Martineau H., (1860), *Daily News*, 15 March).

Harriet Martineau seemed unable to appreciate that trade union organisation and strike action were one of the only means of persuasion available to operatives in the major sweated industries. Neither was she able to see the contradictions offered, on the one hand, by her support of compact and self-help, and, on the other, by her consistent opposition to strikes and other similar workers' action.

A good many traditional writing tasks also fell to her as a working journalist with the Daily News such as reporting on royal occasions, biographical obituaries, book reviews, commenting on the passage of the seasons, summaries of the year's news and so on. According to Webb, she applied herself to these with the same frankness and vigour as she did with topics of immediate interest to her. (57)

In April 1866, Harriet Martineau retired from the Daily News. When the Brighton Railway stopped paying dividends at the end of the 1860s, she was in some financial difficulty, and the republication of some of her biographical sketches from the Daily News was arranged to tide her over. (58) She came out of retirement again on two occasions, once to write an article opposing spiritualism for the Edinburgh Review (59) and, again, to take part in the fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1870 alongside Josephine Butler and Florence Nightingale. (See below).

Commentators on Harriet Martineau have drawn heavily on the Autobiography written in 1855, yet often omitted consideration of the Daily News leaders since she had only worked for the newspaper for two or three years before the Autobiography was written. It is only recently, since Webb's cataloguing of the Daily New leaders in 1959, that those evaluating Harriet Martineau's career have been able to survey the complete range of her journalistic output.

In my view, Harriet Martineau's journalism is the most accessible of all her work to the modern reader since her style is clear, sharply focused, and jargon-free. Moreover, because she wrote for many journals and newspapers throughout a long period of cultural and political change, readers can gain a real sense, in her work, of the unfolding of the Victorian era. Clearly some contemporary issues are of more interest to the modern reader than others. For example, her views on education seem fresher and more relevant than her deliberations about the Crimean War or arterial drainage. (60) Whatever topic she addresses, however, she provides us with some added insight into the excitements and the disputations of an era long since gone but still of enormous importance to our history and culture.

Sociology

Harriet Martineau was described by Rossi ⁽⁶¹⁾ as the first woman sociologist, and by Riedesel, as a 'founding mother'. ⁽⁶²⁾ Harriet Martineau certainly shared with Alexis De Toqueville (1805-59), the French political theorist and a contemporary, the wish to describe and explain the points of difference and similarity between the young American nation and her own more stratified country of origin. She used an institutional framework, noticeable in the section headings of her 1837 work *Society in America*, ⁽⁶³⁾ to trace the ways by which moral values are determined by institutional structure. For example, she observed the impact of marriage and family life on American women, noting their vigour before and their rapid ageing afterwards. ⁽⁶⁴⁾ Her methodology textbook *How to Observe* published in 1838 ⁽⁶⁵⁾ has been described as the 'first book on methodology of social research'. ⁽⁶⁶⁾ In fact, the comparative perspective she took is similar, in certain aspects, to much of the work of social scientists today.

When Harriet Martineau travelled to the United States in 1834, she was one of the first woman visitors to the comparatively new democracy, and hers was not merely the visit of a tourist. While in America she kept a voluminous journal recording details of her stay meticulously; names, dates, events, observations. She opted for a 'scientific' approach to observation and discussed the similarities

between scientific exploration and discovery and the observation of social manners and morals. She postulated that observers should be objective, impartial, and aware of their own prejudices. Further, observers needed to be clear about the aims of observation and adopt a relative rather than a moral analysis of social institutions.

The observer who sets out with a more philosophical belief, not only escapes the affliction of seeing sin wherever he (*sic*) sees a difference, and avoids the suffering and contempt and alienation from his species but, by being prepared for what he witnesses and aware of the causes, is free from the agitation of being shocked and alarmed, preserves his calmness, his hope, his sympathy; and is thus far better fitted to perceive, understand, and report upon the morals and manners of the people he visits.

(Martineau H., (1938), *How to Observe*, London, Charles Knight, pp. 22-3)

Briefly, the traveller, according to *How to Observe*, should: begin with a set of principles (a theoretical framework) that would direct his or her observations; develop beforehand a set of questions to be answered through observation and interview; be objective yet sympathetic to the subjects under study; attempt to have as representative a sample of subjects as possible; and engage in a systematic study of the institutions of society.

She gave some useful tips for observers. These included advice on the preparation of questions and the desirability of keeping a daily journal. She also gave guidance on interviewing; for example, advising interviewers always to have a notebook to hand, though never to take notes during an interview. (67)

Harriet Martineau focused, in particular, on those social and political institutions which were indicative of a country's social characteristics and therefore worthy of observation. These included the political system and government, the economy, religion, and women and the family. For example, under the heading 'Politics' she included as sub-section headings: 'parties', 'general and state government', 'office', 'newspapers', 'apathy in citizenship', 'allegiance to law', 'sectional prejudice', 'citizenship of people of colour', and 'political non-existence of women'. In her comparison of American and European society, she found favour, in general, with the American experiment. North America in the 1830s, in her view, was not burdened with the medieval baggage of hereditary aristocracy, class division and state religion. However among the glaring contradictions between American ideals and practice were the continuation of slavery and the subordination of women. (68)

Since one of the fundamental principles held by the Declaration of Independence, she argued in *Society in America*, was that 'governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed', how could the existing political positions of women and black people be reconciled to this? 'The democratic principle condemns all this as wrong; and requires equal political representation for all rational human beings. Children, idiots and criminals...are the only fair exceptions.' (69) Her basic premise was that genuine freedom means individuals having control over their own destinies, and fundamental to this is the right to political

representation. Lack of representation for women was not only unfair but degrading:

It is pleaded that half the human race does acquiesce in the decision of the other half, as to their rights and duties...Such acquiescence proves nothing but degradation of the injured party. It inspires the same emotions of pity as the supplication of the freed slave who kneels to his master to restore him to slavery, that he might have his animal wants supplied, without being troubled with human rights and duties.

(Martineau H., (1837), *Society in America*, 1, London, Saunders & Otley, p. 203-4)

In her view the solutions to social injustice were simple, if perhaps, contradictory. The abolition of slavery, to be achieved by 'philanthropists', would end the 'race' problem, '70' yet the emancipation of women would only be achieved by women themselves;

methods of charity will not avail to cure the evil. It lies deep: it lies in the subordination of the sex: and upon this the exposures and remonstrances of philanthropists may ultimately succeed in fixing the attention of society; particularly of women. The progression of emancipation of any class usually, if not always, takes place through the efforts of individuals of that class: and so it must be here.

(Ibid., p. 307)

Political representation apart, the other major factor determining women's social and political position, according to Harriet Martineau, was *economic dependency*. Women were excluded from the public life because their education fitted them for domestic pursuits only. The only activity open to women was marriage and the family.

Marriage is the only object left open to women. Philosophy she may only pursue fancifully, and under pain of ridicule: science only as a pastime, and under a similar penalty. Art is declared to be left open: but the necessary learning, and, yet more, the indispensable experience of reality, are denied to her. Literature is also said to be permitted: but under what penalties and restrictions? Nothing is thus open for women but marriage.

(Ibid., 3, pp. 108-9)

A further sociological achievement, however, still remained before her, one that saw her 'acting as a catalyst in the birth of sociology'. ⁽⁷¹⁾ She achieved a 'remarkable accomplishment': the translation into English of Auguste Comte's great work *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-42), which she commenced in 1851 and finished within two years. It was more than just a translation. She rewrote and condensed the book with the full approval of the author and when completed, two volumes replaced the original six. 'So well was her work accomplished', reported Miller, 'that Comte himself adopted it for his students' use, removing from his list of books for Positivists his own edition of his course and instead, recommending the English translation by Miss Martineau'. ⁽⁷²⁾ It is still quoted as a main English translation in modern reference books; for example, in Chamber's *Biographical Dictionary*, published in 1974. ⁽⁷³⁾

The philosophy of Positivism recognised knowledge of the world, of society, as a consistent whole. Thus, like science, human behaviour was regarded as dictated by natural laws of society. For example, human thought processes passed through critical stages -

theological, metaphysical and, finally, positivist or experimental. Comte's appeal for Harriet Martineau rested on his 'scientific' rather than metaphysical approach to the unification of knowledge. Although, as we have seen, she opposed government intervention in the economy, she did not eschew the application of scientific wisdom to social and economic problems - economic non-intervention was simply part of the analysis. Whilst Comte did not share Harriet Martineau's commitment to social justice, her theoretical perspective on the world accorded with his.

We find ourselves suddenly living and moving in the midst of the universe - as part of it, and not as its aim and object. We find ourselves living, not under capricious and arbitrary circumstances, unconnected with the constitution and movements of the whole, but under great, general laws, which operate on us as part of the whole.

(Martineau H., (1853), 'Preface', *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, London, John Chapman, p. 10)

Above all, her affinity with Comtean Positivism was based on his affirmation of the importance of empirical method. She was critical of those that declaimed without evidence:

Pride of intellect surely abides with those who insist on belief without evidence and on a philosophy derived from their own intellectual action, without material and corroboration from without, and not with those who are too scrupulous and too humble to transcend evidence, and to add, out of their own imaginations, to that which is, and may be, referred to other judgements.

(Ibid., p. 10)

Given her achievements, why is Harriet Martineau only to be found in the footnotes of the history of sociology? It is true that she lacked academic credentials, and her writings were seldom intended to be scholarly in the conventional sense. She seems to have had little direct impact on the immediate discipline and the Comte translation was the closest she came to inclusion within institutional sociology. Yet, in my view, whilst Riedesel admits Harriet Martineau's importance as a 'founding mother', he underestimates her understanding of methodology and theory, and also the worth of the 'corpus' of work that she left behind. (74)

Certainly, women have been rendered invisible as theorists within sociology as in other disciplines. If one surveys sociological theory or history of sociology texts, one can rarely find women among those whom the discipline has legitimated as major contributors to sociological thinking and analysis. Beatrice Webb, perhaps, is the exception. And it is interesting to note that it was feminist sociologists, such as Alice Rossi, who first gave attention to Harriet Martineau's sociological legacy. (75) Perhaps Harriet Martineau would have judged the efforts of women sociologists to legitimate the work of other women, such as herself, as a measure of the social progress so far achieved.

History

Harriet Martineau began her major historical work *The History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace 1816-1846* in 1848 ⁽⁷⁶⁾ - 'a book with incontestable claims to greatness', according to her highly critical biographer, R.K. Webb. ⁽⁷⁷⁾ (It will henceforth be referred to as the *History*).

Her publisher, Charles Knight, impressed by what he saw as the startling accomplishments of English industry and commerce in the thirty years between Waterloo and the repeal of the Corn Laws, had started, in 1846, to write a history of the period. However business problems prevented its completion so he approached Harriet Martineau to continue the project, to which she agreed. When she began writing in August 1848, she found difficulty in getting started as her mother was seriously ill (and, in fact, died later that year). Also, she was not convinced that she could write a history. ⁽⁷⁸⁾ In the event, she settled down to the task with her usual vigour and delivered volume one of the manuscript in the following February (1849) and the second volume at the end of that year. The book was originally published in thirty monthly numbers, each of which earned her forty pounds. In 1849 and 1850, after the final instalment had appeared, the whole work was republished in a two volume edition.

The *History* proved popular - by summer 1849 its sales had doubled and were still increasing. Knight thought Harriet Martineau could

build on this success by extending the history to cover the entire first half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence, another volume covering 1800-1815 was published in 1851 as introductory to the main text. (79) In 1864, when an American firm Porter and Coates proposed to republish the history, she wrote a concluding chapter, extending the period covered by the History to 1854. (80)

In fact writing a contemporary history of the kind required from Harriet Martineau was not easy. It had to withstand the scrutiny of contemporaries, such as George Eliot (see chapter 3), and also provide an intelligible interpretation for later generations. It seems that she achieved this in the sense that her contemporaries showed their appreciation of the history by buying it in great numbers, it was extensively used by Elie Halevy as a source for his History of the English People in 1924, (81) and it is regarded with respect by present historians of the nineteenth century such as Webb.

The strength of the History is that it is no mere chronicle but rather a sustained historical study from a particular perspective. To Harriet Martineau, the history of ideas was the only true history. Individuals were important as representatives of ideas and stages of progress in the development of civilisation but as civilisation matured, the nature of institutions and laws were likely to be of more interest. (82)

She drew on a wide range of sources for the History, for example, the Annual Register, articles in Hansard and journals, memoirs, and the letters of public figures. And she also had a considerable amount of 'insider' knowledge from her own contacts with the people who were then shaping history. (83) The History, somewhat Whiggish in approach, attempted to record and explain the progress made in Britain at a time of relative peace and freedom. It was a celebration of *laissez-faire* ideas and can perhaps be seen as the epilogue to the Illustrations. She wrote about progress but not in the tradition of Macaulay who wrote his history in 1848 to glorify the age. (84) She admitted to being encouraged by the measurable progress which had been made during the last thirty years, but was not blind to the inequities that still continued. (85)

In the History she catalogued the political confrontations and parliamentary proceedings which accompanied the enactment of the reform legislation. She wrote about the nation's economic fluctuations. She drew attention to social problems, especially as they affected the working class. She noted the irreversibility of industrialisation and urbanisation, discussed British foreign and imperial policy, and commented on the leading personalities of the period. What is somewhat unexpected is that the History is extremely readable. Her skills in scene setting are evident, for example, in the description of the Cato Conspiracy of 1820:

On Saturday, February 19th, it was resolved by the gang to murder the ministers, each at his own house: and without further delay, as their poverty would not allow them to wait any longer. On the Tuesday, however, Edwards informed them

that there was to be a cabinet-dinner at Lord Harrowby's the next day. Thistlewood sent out for a newspaper, to see if it was true; and finding it to be so, remarked: "As there has not been a dinner so long, there will, no doubt, be fourteen or sixteen there: and it will be a rare haul to murder them all together." Thus it was settled.

(Martineau H., (1849-50), *History of the Thirty Years' Peace*, 1, 1877 edn., London, George Bell & Sons, p. 317)

The History had two main focal points:- the democratisation of the old aristocratic legislative progress, culminating with the 1832 Reform Act; and the liberalisation of the ancient commercial monopolies which culminated in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Both symbolised progress, despite evidence that more improvements were needed.

Harriet Martineau's History began where Knight had left off, with the years following Peterloo. The 1819 massacre at St. Peter's Fields symbolised for her the end of an era and the beginning of the reform process. With the arrival of the 1820s, she believed that 'men were going unconsciously into the great change which the next twenty years were to accomplish.' Further, she saw this period as a turning point in the nation's history: as a time 'requiring for its administration a new order of men.' (86) She viewed the 1820s in necessarian and Comtean terms, as a time of peace and 'organic' change.

After the peace, a different set of conditions gradually developed themselves. When the war is over...an organic state succeeds wherein all individual will succumb to the workings of general laws. The statesman can no longer be a political

hero, overruling influences and commanding events. He can only be a statesman in the new days who is a servant to principles - the agent of the great natural laws of society.

(Ibid., 1, p. 433)

If the decade of the 1820s had seen the erosion of old religious privileges in such legislation as the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, the 1830s would be the decade of parliamentary reform. She was a confident supporter of democratic solutions, and she used the pages of the *History* as much to advocate the extension of democratic reform as to describe the historic achievements of 1832. For example, here she describes the groupings in support of the Reform Bill

On the side of the measure, there was...an agreement to work out cordially for the bill as it was offered, in the hope of supplying its deficiencies afterwards. Many would have desired an extension of the franchise downwards, as well as upwards, and laterally, as was now provided by the removal of many restrictions. Yet more had hoped for the ballot, to purify the elections, and for a shortening of the duration of parliaments. But all agreed to relinquish their minor objections for the time, to secure the overthrow of borough corruption; and the great cry was agreed upon which from that hour rang through the land for above a year: 'the bill, the whole bill and nothing but the bill'.

(Ibid., 2, pp. 425-6)

But she was under no illusion about the limitations of the Reform Act, itself. She saw it as nothing more than a token gesture towards democracy which had left parliament still aristocratic in tone and corrupt in electoral practice. She believed that its significance lay not upon its immediate effect upon members of

parliament but rather in its promise of genuine representation in the future.

Such was the Reform Act of 1832, by which the landed interests were brought down some little way...but which had now become insufferably tyrannical and corrupt. As the manufacturing and commercial classes had long been rising in numbers, property and enlightenment, it was time for them to be obtaining a proportionate influence in the government. By this act they did not obtain their due influence; but they gained much, and the way was cleared for more.

(Ibid., 2, p. 483)

The year 1848, when Harriet Martineau first started work on her History, was also the year of the largest and best organised Chartist demonstrations. It was, therefore, difficult for her to assess either the nature of Chartism or the direction it would take. She was not to know, for example, that the largest Chartist protest would also be the last. She chose to interpret the Charter as a political expression of what had begun as a social problem: a demand for representation by working people who had struggled through a succession of poor harvests and industrial unemployment. If she did not always applaud their methods, she approved of the aims of the Chartists and had supported their struggle for a voice in parliament.

There were [Chartist] men among the working-classes, sound-headed and sound-hearted, wanting nothing but a wider social knowledge and experience to make them fit and safe guides of

their order...who saw that the Reform Bill was, if not a failure in itself, a failure in regard of popular expectation from it...A vast proportion of the people...were not represented at all.

(Ibid, 3, pp. 261).

She also upheld the franchise claims of artisans, operatives, non-conformists and Jews, but was remarkably silent in the *History* about the enfranchisement of women. She still held the beliefs about the lack of political representation of women that she had expressed on her return from her trip to the United States in the 1830s. A probable reason for the omission of this topic from the *History* was that votes for women could not, at the time of its writing, be popularly admitted. 'It was a concept,' Pichanick notes, 'whose time had not yet arrived'. (87)

By the time of the 1841 election, Harriet Martineau had given up all hope of a Whig-Radical coalition, and now believed that given the discontent and unrest among the labouring classes 'nothing could avert a revolution sooner or later'. (88) However she was happy that the tired, old Whig administration was at last gone. As for the new Tory administration:

If the Peel cabinet should prove a reforming one, that would be the best thing that could happen. If it should still prove too conservative, there was now a fair field of opposition open, in which the political life of the country could exercise itself, and ascertain how much energy it could still command.

(Ibid., 4, p. 88)

The Tory prime minister, Robert Peel, seemed to provide some hope for the future: a statesman precisely adapted to his age, in Harriet Martineau's view. She was possibly not a little influenced by Peel's anti-protectionist position at this time.

He [Robert Peel] must propose and carry through a total repeal of the corn-laws...This must be his single and final aim; and those who knew anything of the 'alacrity of spirit' with which a strong and honourable mind enters on a great work of reparation, self-sacrifice and general justice, believed that Sir R. Peel would now make manifest to the utmost the nobleness of his position and the singleness of his aim.

(Ibid., 4, p. 401)

As the economy improved in the 1860s, she ascribed British prosperity to free trade in general and to the repeal of the Corn Laws in particular. In later decades, the flooding of the markets with cheap American grain was to lead to questions about the relative merits of free trade as opposed to protectionism. In the initial years, however, it seemed that both the farmers and the industrialists were reaping the benefits from the newly liberalised trade laws. She wrote in her Autobiography: 'The repeal of the Corn Laws, with the consequent improvement in agriculture, and the prodigious increase in emigration have extinguished all present apprehension and talk of "surplus population" - that great difficulty of forty or fifty years ago.' (89) Other themes emerged that were taken up later in her Daily News days, such as opposition to factory legislation, support for education, and discussion of Irish affairs.

Most recent commentaries on Harriet Martineau as an historian have focused on the neglect of the *History*, viewing it as an important contemporary text which should be much more used by modern historians of nineteenth century Britain (see chapter 3). The style is readable, frequently gripping, and its author's contemporaneity is, perhaps, even more significant today than ever. Further, Harriet Martineau's eye was acute and her opinions thoroughly informed. In my view, the *History* should no longer be perceived as a somewhat dated historical narrative which has been superceded by more recent and sophisticated scholarship. Rather it seems to have stood the test of time, providing valuable insights into nineteenth century politics and culture, more than a century after its original publication.

Autobiography

Harriet Martineau wrote her *Autobiography* in 1855 in three months, at breakneck speed when she believed that she was dying. She had thought seriously about it at two earlier stages in her life: in 1831 before she became famous, and during her period of ill-health in the 1840s. She now thought that she should record her lifetime's experiences and the development of her political and theological beliefs before she died.

From my youth upwards I have felt that it was one of the duties of my life to write my autobiography. I have always enjoyed, and derived profit from, reading those of other persons, from the most meagre to the fullest: and certain qualities of my own mind, - a strong consciousness and a clear memory in regard to my early feelings, - have seemed to indicate to me the duty of

recording my own experience. When my life became evidently a somewhat remarkable one, the obligation presented itself more strongly to my conscience: and when I made up my mind to interdict the publication of my private letters, the duty became unquestionable.

(Martineau H., (1877), Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, 1, London, Smith, Elder and Co., p. 1)

She gave two main reasons for writing the Autobiography. First, as a champion of truth and objectivity, she felt under an obligation to posterity to provide a true account of her life. Secondly, she felt that she needed to explain the development of her beliefs from the Unitarianism of her youth to her present state of secular enlightenment. 'The most important part [of the Autobiography] is the true account of my conscious transition from Xn [Christian] faith to my present philosophy.' (90)

The two-volume Autobiography can be understood at a number of levels. It can be viewed as the interesting memoirs of an eminent early Victorian - a success story of the most romantic, and even, at times, melodramatic kind. It tells of Harriet Martineau's unhappy childhood, her short-lived love affair, national fame at almost the first attempt, acceptance on a social level by the most important in the land, and finally a long period of industry, security and contentment in her later years. There is a tantalizing glimpse, for example, of the rigours of an early nineteenth-century domestic household and the terrors it held for an anxious, withdrawn little girl who was afraid of the shadows and who seemed a constant irritant to her somewhat cool and unsympathetic family.

We were often sent to walk on the Castle Hill at Norwich. In the wide area below, the residents were wont to expose their feather-beds, and to beat them with a stick, That sound, - a dull shock, - used to make my heart stand still: and it was no use my standing at the rails above, and seeing the process. The striking of the blow and the arrival of the sound did not correspond; and this made matters worse. I hated that walk; and I believe for that reason. My parents knew nothing of all this. It never occurred to me to speak of any thing I felt most: and I doubt whether they ever had the slightest idea of my miseries.

(Ibid., 1, p. 11)

In fact, she was frightened of most people, even members of her family. 'To the best of my belief, the first person I was ever not afraid of was Aunt Kentish, who won my heart and my confidence when I was sixteen.' ⁽⁹¹⁾ However things improved for Harriet as she grew older and she saw her life, after her move to the Lake District, as typifying spring, summer and autumn of her life in swift succession. For her, life did indeed begin at forty.

My life, as it has been seen, began with winter. Then followed a season of storm and sunshine, merging in a long gloom. If I had died of that six years' illness, I should have considered my life a fair average one, as to happiness...At past forty years of age, I began to relish life, without drawback...During this last sunny period, I have not acquired any dread or dislike of death; but I have felt for the first time, a keen and unvarying relish of life.

(Ibid., 2, pp. 205-6)

At another level, the Autobiography offers an insight into many of the themes which were of central concern to the Victorian political and intellectual elite, particularly those of Radical persuasion. It enabled Harriet Martineau to revisit the important intellectual

themes of her life - political economy, education, the 'Woman Question', politics, parliamentary reform and so on. Religious and philosophical considerations also had a substantial place in the thoughts and ideas of the time, and even if, for Harriet Martineau, religious creeds held little significance, she expended a great deal of energy in defining and clarifying her own position in relation to them. For example:

In regard to disbelief in theology...there is an essential point, - the most essential of all, - in regard to which the secular and the theological worlds seem to need conviction almost equally: viz., the real value of science, and of philosophy as its legitimate offspring. It seems to us, even now, the most impossible or, speaking cautiously, the rarest thing in the world to find any body who has the remotest conception of the indispensableness of science as the only source of, not only enlightenment, but wisdom, goodness and happiness.

(Ibid., 2, p. 330)

Harriet Martineau wrote about her life with a candour and lack of sentiment which typified her work. She wrote the *Autobiography* in 1855 though it was not published until after her death. When the work finally appeared, it was seen as deeply offensive by some of her contemporaries, as we can see in chapter 3. However, it is difficult today to see why the publication was so controversial.

She could, it is true, be rather cutting about some of the people she met in London society and, perhaps, this was one of the reasons for the *Autobiography's* uncertain reception - though by the time of its publication many were long dead. For example, in criticising

the obvious vanity of some of the society men she met in London, she made some sharp observations about their gendered behaviour.

I had heard all my life about the vanity of women as a subject of pity to men: but when I went to London, lo! I saw vanity in high places which was never transcended by that of women in their lowlier rank. There was Brougham, wincing under a newspaper criticism, and playing the fool among silly women. There was Jeffrey, flirting with clever women, in long succession. There was Bulwer, on a sofa, sparkling and languishing among a set of female votaries, - he and they dized out, perfumed, and presenting the nearest picture to a seraglio to be seen on British ground, - only the difference or hauteur of the lord of the harem being absent. There was poor Campbell the poet, obtruding his sentimentalities, amidst a quivering apprehension, of making himself ridiculous.

(Ibid., 1, pp. 350-1)

She also had criticisms to make of her professional relationships with some individuals, as we have seen in the case of Charles Dickens. Yet, many of her portraits, for example, of the poet, William Wordsworth or the novelist, Charlotte Bronte, are affectionately, though rarely sentimentally, drawn. Of Wordsworth's attitude towards his 'poor, gentle' neighbour, the poet Hartley Coleridge, '[he] treated him as gently as if he had been - (what indeed he was in our eyes) - a sick child'. (92) And after discussing Wordsworth's importance as a poet at length, she wrote with some humour:

In regard to politics, however, and even to religion, he grew more and more liberal in his latter years. It is in that view, and as a neighbour amongst the cottagers, that he is most genially remembered: and considering the course of flattery he

was subjected to by his blue-stockings and clerical neighbours, who coaxed him into a monologue, and then wrote down all he said for future publication, it is wonderful that there is anything so genial to record.

(Ibid., 2, p. 240)

Impressed by Deerbrook, ⁽⁹³⁾ Charlotte Bronte had sent Harriet a copy of her own latest book *Shirley*, 'in acknowledgement of the pleasure and profit' she had derived from Harriet's work. ⁽⁹⁴⁾ A meeting between the two women was then arranged which was described in the *Autobiography* with considerable feeling.

When she was seated by me on the sofa, she cast up at me such a look - so loving, so appealing, - that, in connexion with her deep mourning dress, and the knowledge that she was the sole survivor of her family, I could with the utmost difficulty return her smile, or keep my composure. I should have been heartily glad to cry.

(Ibid., 2, p. 326)

The *Autobiography* was certainly not as truthful or objective as its author intended. It might even have been less a confessional than a memoir, and less an analysis than a narrative, as Pichanick suggests. ⁽⁹⁵⁾ However it has similar merits to those of the *History*, if somewhat more personally written, in offering the reader insights into a culture long since passed.

Autobiography was a popular genre in the mid-nineteenth century, as Shumaker shows. ⁽⁹⁶⁾ However the autobiographies of women were distinctive. Elizabeth Winston suggests that women writing before 1920 showed ambivalence about being professional writers at a time

when the usual pattern for women was immersion in domesticity. (97)

And in a survey of Victorian, female biographers undertaken by Sanders in 1986, it was found that women who were subsequently successful in their professional lives, were ambitious as girls, and believed in their own special destiny, generally as writers. (98)

Most, nevertheless, dismissed their early ambitions as immature or egocentric; most tried to minimise what they saw as the selfish impulses that thrust them into full and stimulating careers; and most tried to convince their audiences that their professional acclaim was, initially at least, fortuitous and unimportant. (99)

(Some of these ideas are explored more fully in chapter 4.)

Most of the above claims, however, are inapplicable to Harriet Martineau. Whilst it is evident that she wanted to be a writer from an early age, there is no sense, in her writing, of ambition or undue modesty. The impression gained is rather of a hard-working woman, who, by chance and good luck, created a successful series which brought her independence and a long and enjoyable career - despite being continually dogged by ill-health. The two volumes portray the particular perceptions of a *woman* in the forefront of mid-nineteenth century British political and cultural life. Its re-publication in 1983 (100) enables us to reflect on Harriet Martineau's interpretation of life in her own times, the range of activities that she could become involved with, and how these differed from her male peers. The *Autobiography* should therefore be counted as a valuable addition to women's history, as well as illuminating the cultural concerns of the Victorian era.

Literature

It could be argued that most of Harriet Martineau's literary contributions should be subsumed under other headings, for example, politics, economy, and history, because she used fiction to popularise theory. These works, however, will not be the focus of this section. She produced two novels, *Deerbrook* in 1839, and *The Hour and the Man* in 1841, and a series of well received children's stories in *The Playfellow* series in 1841 - *The Settlers at Home*, *The Prince and the Peasant*, *Feats on the Fiord*, and *The Crofton Boys* - in addition to her economic tales and other moral and didactic works. (101) It is with *Deerbrook* and, to a lesser extent, her children's stories that this section will be concerned.

Harriet Martineau's contribution as a novelist and writer has been interpreted in a variety of ways: as a female role model, as a Victorian woman expressing sexual feelings, as a writer in the new genre of the domestic novel, and as an early and influential writer of children's books - as we shall see in the next chapter.

Deerbrook was in its day a pioneering and innovative novel. This can be gauged from the fact that Harriet Martineau had difficulty in finding a publisher, though she was a well established writer by this time. In 1839, the reading public was conditioned to romances, high adventure, and the fantasies of the aristocratic novel. She was, thus, breaking new ground by wanting to write about middle class life with an apothecary as a hero, and a heroine who came from

Birmingham. However she was taken aback at her publication difficulties:

I was not aware then how strong the hold on the public mind which "the silver-fork school" had gained...People liked high life in novels, and low life, and ancient life: and life of any rank presented by Dickens...but it was not supposed that they would bear a presentment of the familiar life of every day.

(Ibid., 2, pp. 114-5).

As the first novel of an already established writer, *Deerbrook* was well received by the literary journals and drew favourable comparison with the works of Jane Austen. For example, a review in the *Athenaeum* assessed it as 'a village tale, as simple in its structure and unambitious in its delineations, as one of Miss Austen's; but including characters of a higher order of mental force and spiritual attainment than Miss Austen ever drew - save perhaps *Persuasion*.' (102) It was not a best seller but, nevertheless, went into two editions though it was overshadowed by the outpouring of 'domestic' fiction which followed in the 1840s and 1850s.

Deerbrook's literary merits were compared with the works of the 'golden' novelists of the day, such as Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, and its reputation judged 'minor' rather than 'major'. (103)

In some ways, *Deerbrook* pre-figured George Eliot's work. Set in a rural village among the professional middle classes, Harriet Martineau attempted to blend the personal lives of two sisters with social comment and analysis of the village to which they have come

to live. Village life is portrayed as a hive of gossip, innuendo and personal rivalries within the context of closely observed class differences. Its author revealed her political and class affiliations in her portrayal of the upper classes as self-publicising, corrupt and bigoted, and the 'workies' as deprived, superstitious and easily led. Her main (middle-class) characters thrive on a succession of crises, and though she was careful to distinguish between hardship and destitution (the latter on which she laid the blame for riots, crime and social unrest), their happiness increases in proportion to their ability to become self-sufficient.

The book has been interpreted in two different ways; as the forerunner to the newly emerging domestic novel and as a vehicle of sexual self-expression. First, it has been claimed that Harriet Martineau pioneered the 'domestic' novel. *Deerbrook* and other 'domestic' novels emerged as the consequence of numerous influences in the early nineteenth century; radicalism, reform, evangelicalism and romanticism. These values, according to Colby, were reflected in the creation of a new genre - the bourgeois love story, parochial, domestic and filled with the minutiae of daily living.

(104) Certainly these features are present in *Deerbrook*, for example, in Harriet Martineau's portrayal of the duties of the newly-wed Hester:

She saw at once the difference in the relation between tradespeople and their customers in a large town like Birmingham, and in a village where there is but one baker, where the grocer and the hatter are the same personage, and

where you cannot fly from your butcher, be he ever so much your foe. Hester therefore made it her business to transact herself all affairs with the village tradesmen. She began her housekeeping energetically, and might be seen in Mr. Jones's open shop in the coldest morning of January, selecting her joint of meat; or deciding among brown sugars at Tucker's, the grocer's.

(Martineau H., (1839), Deerbrook, London, Smith, Elder & Co., pp. 197-8)

Second, it has been suggested that that Harriet Martineau used Deerbrook as a vehicle to dwell on some of the most intimate parts of her personal experience, real or imaginary. ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Figs claims that Harriet Martineau allows the following discussion between two of the main characters of the book, Margaret who is the heroine and the less beautiful of the Ibbotsen sisters and Maria, the crippled governess, to explore issues of love and sexual passion.

I was speaking of love - the grand influence of a woman's life, but whose name is a mere empty sound to her till it becomes suddenly, secretly, a voice which shakes her being from the very centre - more awful, more tremendous than the crack of doom...From the struggle which calls upon her to endure, silently and alone; - from the agony of a change of existence which must be wrought without any eye perceiving it...

At the image of his dwelling anywhere but at her side, of his having any interest apart from hers, the universe is, in a moment, shrouded in gloom. Her heart is sick, and there is no rest for it, for her self-respect has gone. She has been reared in a maidenly pride, and an innocent confidence: her confidence is wholly broken down; her pride is wounded and the agony of the wound is intolerable.

(Martineau H., (1839), Deerbrook, London, Edward Moxon, p. 159 & 162)

It is difficult to know what to make of these passages given that Harriet Martineau was extremely critical of women writers such as

Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Bronte for being the victims of passion. (106) It was these passages, however, which Charlotte Bronte recognised as an influence on her own writing. (107) As an experienced author and aware of the book's selling potential, Harriet Martineau may have been writing about purely imaginary and fictionalised feelings in order to increase book sales. Some of the more lurid passages give the impression that this certainly could have been the case. On the other hand, she may well have been remembering past romantic feelings, necessarily kept secret because of the social conventions of the time. She wrote *Deerbrook* in her mid-thirties, as a relatively young woman. She could have been describing feelings she had, say, for her brother James, or for William J. Fox, the editor of the *Monthly Repository*, with whom she spent many hours, or for her doomed fiance James Worthington, or for someone she met during her sojourn in London.

Whether or not Harriet Martineau was indeed reflecting on her own romantic experiences in *Deerbrook*, she did not write another domestic novel, neither, apart from the heroic *The Hour and the Man*, did she write another novel for adults. She did however return to fiction when she was ill in Tynmouth; but this time for children. 'I had planned the light and easy work (for which alone I was now fit), of a series of children's tales'. (108)

The *Playfellow* series is a highly melodramatic collection, likely, one would imagine, to frighten as much as to amuse any child who read it. The first story, *The Settlers at Home*, deals with children

who have lost their parents in a flood and have to feed and shelter themselves, a servant and their baby brother, helped only intermittently by a gypsy boy. Harriet Martineau did not flinch from portraying the real dangers of a flood. People and animals are drowned, houses destroyed and the children's baby brother dies when they can no longer obtain milk for him because their cow has starved to death. The bleak picture is relieved somewhat at the end of the story when the children are rescued and there is some suggestion that Roger, the gypsy, is likely to undergo a gradual moral change.

The Prince and the Peasant, the second tale, is a simplified historical account of the final days of the French monarchy during the revolution, and was according to the Autobiography, the least popular of the tales. ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Feats on the Fiord, the next tale, is probably Harriet Martineau's single best known work and was published many times over, most recently in 1953. ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ By good luck or judgement she hit upon a plot which sustained interest and tension. The story is set in Norway and interweaves two central themes; the 'superstitious' beliefs of the Norwegian peasantry in malicious evil spirits and the real threat to the community from pirates who rob and loot their homes and farms.

By far the most sensitive and complex work was the last tale in the series, The Crofton Boys. This has the distinction, according to Thomas, ⁽¹¹¹⁾ of being the first work written for children in English which fully merits the genre description of 'psychological novel'. It tells the story of Hugh Proctor, the youngest son of a

chemist, who longs to attend Crofton School. Once enrolled in the school, he discovers that his dreamy personality is at odds with the rigid ethos of the public school. He is brought to a sudden crisis when his foot is crushed by a heavy stone and has to be amputated. The rest of the book follows Hugh's attempt to adjust to his disability. Thomas describes this somewhat sombre story as one of the subtlest explorations of a child's state of mind in nineteenth-century children's books. (112)

Once again, whilst *The Playfellow* series seems somewhat dated from the perspective of the late twentieth century, it is easy to see why the tales were so popular, and certainly innovatory, compared with other children's literature of the time. Despite her rather melodramatic scenarios, Harriet Martineau seemed able to write at a level appropriate to children, yet avoid being sentimental or patronising. For example, in her most popular tale *Feats in the Fiord*, she educates as well as entertains.

Every one who has looked at the map of Norway must have been struck with the singular character of its coast. On the map it looks so jagged, such a strange mixture of land and sea, that it appears as if there must be a perpetual struggle between the two - the sea striving to inundate the land, and the land pushing itself out into the sea, till it ends in their dividing the region between them...

Long was the supper, and hearty was the mirth round the table. People in Norway have universally a hearty appetite - such an appetite as we English have no idea of. Whether it is owing to

the sharper climate, or to the active life led by all, whatever may be the cause, such is the fact. This night piles of fish disappeared first, and then joint after joint of reindeer venison.

(Martineau H., (1841), *Feats on the Fiord*, London, Edward Moxon, pp. 1-2 & 25.)

And even the disaster-packed *The Settlers at Home* ends on a slightly less pessimistic note.

Mrs. Linacre [the mother] did look happy, even in the midst of her tears for her poor baby. Mildred was recovering, Oliver ate and slept, and whistled under the window - like a light-hearted boy, as he once again amused himself with carving every bit of hard wood he could find. It was clear that he had escaped a fever; and every day that refreshed his colour, and filled out his thin face again, brought nearer the hour of his father's return.

(Martineau H., (1841), *The Settlers at Home*, London, Edward Moxon, p. 231.)

On a number of counts, then, Harriet Martineau certainly seems to fit Showalter's 'role innovator' model as a novelist. (113) She experimented with new genres of fiction and new ways of expressing personal feelings, even if the literary value of her writing has been brought into question. *Deerbrook* has recently been re-published, and it will be interesting to see whether the general increased interest in nineteenth century women writers will see more of Harriet Martineau's fiction on modern bookshelves.

The 'Woman Question'

As we have already seen, Harriet Martineau was immensely concerned about the education of her own sex. This reflected a lifetime commitment, not only to female education, but also to extending employment and political opportunities for women. Her long literary and journalistic career was regularly punctuated by a section of a book or article devoted to an aspect of female injustice. To categorise her feminism within a modern framework, Harriet Martineau might be identified as a liberal feminist, concerned, albeit passionately, to change the social position of women by reform rather than revolutionary means. (114)

Nobody can be further than I am from being satisfied with the condition of my own sex; under the law and custom of my own country...Often as I am appealed to, to speak, or otherwise assist in the promotion of the cause of Woman, my answer is always the same:- that women, like men, can obtain whatever they show themselves fit for. Let them be educated,- let their powers be cultivated to the extent for which the means are already provided, and all that is wanted or ought to be desired will follow of course. Whatever a woman proves able to do, society will be thankful to see her do,- just as if she were a man. If she is scientific, science will welcome her, as it has welcomed every woman so qualified.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1, pp 400-1.)

Though the above quote has been as viewed by Yates (115) as unrepresentative of some of the more 'radical' aspects of her thinking on women, it incorporates some of Harriet Martineau's most consistently held views; her dissatisfaction with the position of women in nineteenth century society, the importance of female

education, her respect for women's potential achievements and her belief in the primacy of the individual. What it does not do is signal her passionate desire for change, so evident in her other writings on the subject.

Her feminism was a response to several powerful calls on her intellect: her outrage at any social prejudice or injustice (also evidenced in her unrelenting opposition to slavery); the impact of necessarianism which implied belief in human perfectibility regardless of sex; and her need, from a comparatively early age, to be economically independent. These themes are all evident in her writing on women.

She supported many women's initiatives in her lifetime and, in fact, articles written by her were instrumental in establishing two of the most influential feminist pressure groups of the nineteenth century; the Society for Promoting Employment for Women and the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. (116) Yet, Harriet Martineau stood apart from other, usually younger, feminists, such as Barbara Bodichon and Jessie Boucherett, though her influence on them was undoubtedly important. This aloofness was possibly because she had gained the approval of the literary and political establishment by writing about 'male' subjects such as economics, politics and history, and it was important to keep its approbation in order to continue her career (and to remain economically independent).

Or, perhaps, she had become used to being a lone voice in the feminist struggle. In fact, until the 1860s there was no recognisable British women's movement (though as we shall see in chapter 4, there were several strands of feminist activism). According to Pichanick, 'Harriet Martineau's voice was one of the very few raised in lonely and mainly futile protest against the accumulated prejudice of generations.' ⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Eventually, however, she began to be heard. The Society for Promoting Employment for Women (the Langham Place Group) took inspiration from her 'Female Industry' article written in 1859, ⁽¹¹⁸⁾ and the movement led by Josephine Butler against the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts drew on a series of letters written by her for the Daily News in 1863.

⁽¹¹⁹⁾

Harriet Martineau's campaigns concerning the 'Woman Question' can be grouped around a number of themes : education, employment, political rights, marriage and divorce issues, and the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts. These themes will provide the structure for the rest of this section, excluding education which has already dealt with earlier in this chapter.

Women's Employment

It is most likely that her personal circumstances fuelled Harriet Martineau's concern for the extension of employment opportunities for women of all classes. In her influential 1859 article mentioned above, she drew on the 1851 census returns to demonstrate that since

there were at least half a million more women than men, arithmetic dictated that marriage was out of the question for a large number of women. These women could not rely on economic sustenance from a spouse, neither could they necessarily expect help from brothers or fathers. She also drew on the statistics to show that, of the three million women currently in employment, half were compelled to work in order to be self-supporting, and two-thirds were employed outside the family home.

So far from our country-women being all maintained as a matter of course by us, the breadwinners, 3 million out of 6 [million] adult women work for subsistence; and two out of three for independence - we must improve and extend education to the utmost; and then open a fair field to the powers and energies we have educed. This will secure our welfare nationally and in our homes.

(Martineau H., (1859), 'Female Industry', The Edinburgh Review, 222, April, p. 336.)

It is open to speculation as to why she wrote the article as though she were a man viz. the use of the term 'us, the breadwinners'. Presumably she wanted to add more authority to her arguments by concealing her identity and, thereby, her vested interest in the 'Woman Question'. She reported examples of women at work in a wide range of jobs that defied the nineteenth century feminine ideal - making cheese, driving ploughs, separating ore out in the mines, serving middle-class families as cooks, housekeepers and maids, overseeing households, teaching as governesses, book-keeping, selling, and manufacturing in shops alongside husbands or fathers.

In looking over the census returns, the occupations mark out the classes of women employed, the widows, wives, and maidens. The shopkeepers, like the farmers, are almost always widows, who, as wives, assisted their husbands, and who now endeavour to keep up the business for the sake of the children. The same is the case with the 10,000 beershop keepers and victuallers, and the 9,000 inn-keepers and the 14,000 butchers and milk merchants, and the 8,000 waggon or hack-carriage proprietors. Considerable as these numbers are, they would range higher if women were taught bookkeeping in the proper style.

(Ibid., pp. 310-311)

Further, she criticised her contemporaries for not recognising the changes already happening in society or appreciating the industrial and commercial contribution being made by women. The needs of the expanding labour market were judiciously selected to strengthen her arguments.

In a community where a larger proportion of women remain unmarried than in any known period; where a greater number of women depend on their own industry for subsistence; where every pair of hands, moved by an intelligent head, is in request; and where improved machinery demands more and more skilled labour which women can supply, how can there be doubt that women will work more and more.

(Ibid., p. 322)

In the nineteenth century it was considered unsuitable for women not of the working class to be in paid employment. However, Harriet Martineau believed that the poverty which had required her to become financially independent and was forcing other women to seek economic security through their own efforts, had some virtue. It would, ultimately, lead to greater employment opportunities and higher status for women. Through employment, women would prove their

capabilities, improve their social condition and cease to be dependants. She deplored the fact that women were excluded from most professions and crafts, and that when they were employed at the same tasks as men, it was rarely for the same wage. 'There will be not a few, we fear...will satisfy themselves with the conclusion that men do, and always will, pay less for women's services than for men's of the same quality; and that while men do so, women (schoolmistresses and others) will take advantage of the practice.

(120)

Her *laissez-faire*-ism, consistent with her beliefs concerning sex equality, led to her insistence that there should be no male monopoly of jobs, that work should be apportioned according to ability and not sex; and that there should be equal pay for equal work.

Discountenance no exercise of female industry, but encourage it. Do nothing to keep up the exclusions which belong to the old days of guilds and monopolies. When you see the work to be done, and the hands ready to do it, let the hands and work come together.

If the natural laws of society are not permitted free play among us, we may look for more beating of wives and selling of orphans to perdition; and more sacrifice of women to brutal and degrading employments, precisely in proportion to their exclusion from such as befit their social position and natural abilities.'

(Martineau H., (1856), Daily News, 2 April.)

It is true that Harriet Martineau seldom deviated from the doctrine of *laissez-faire* in the early years of her career, but, as we have

seen, by mid-century she was prepared to make exceptions in the cases of women and children in mines, factories and sweated trades. As she became aware of the poor pay and wretched living conditions that yearly drove thousands to prostitution, she conceded that the state would have to intervene 'till we have outgrown the necessity'.

(121)

During the 1850s and 1860s, Harriet Martineau wrote over a dozen leaders for the Daily News on women's work. As already noted, she wrote strong condemnations of the generally appalling requirements and unhealthy environments of women's work-places, and about the low pay in the occupational groups in which the largest number of women were found; needlewomen, maids of all work, governesses and women in agriculture. For example, in the case of needlewomen:

Every year, at the end of the season, when it is too late to do anything but give money and pitying sighs, our wives and sisters hear with grief how prostitution is fed by constant accessions from starved or over-wearied dressmakers. They hear that eye dispensaries and blind asylums would be required for overworked dressmakers, if there were no other class. They are told of the wide varieties of misery, from ruined digestion, from a strained nervous system, from a vexed and worried mind - from, in short, an infringement of the first laws of nature in the case of needlewomen.

(Martineau H., (1857), Daily News, 13 January.)

From Ireland she wrote, in 1852, that, though women in Irish agriculture were underpaid in relation to men, it was Irish women who kept the economy going. (122) She also wrote powerful statements urging women to enter the new profession of nursing and

publicised the need for middle class students to enter Florence Nightingale's St. Thomas' Hospital Nursing School. (123)

Finally, with her sociologist's insight, she addressed the woman of the 'criminal class', acknowledging that women who participated in criminal activities often did so at the behest of men and were frequently subjects of sexual exploitation. Vengeance was not the answer; rather an improved social environment. Accordingly, she recommended rehabilitation by education and worthwhile work for both women and men when released from prison. (124)

Women's Political Rights

Harriet Martineau was also a proponent of women's political rights. But as the quote at the beginning of this section on the 'Woman Question' indicates, she believed that if domestic and economic self-reliance were achieved, political advancement would follow as a matter of course. She was sometimes cautious about advocating women's suffrage - prepared to ruffle feathers but not to risk a 'violent conservative retroaction'. (125) So, when she advocated the extension of the male franchise in 1857, there was no hint of the possible inclusion of women. She realised that such a suggestion would inhibit rather than advance the changes she wanted.

Nevertheless, she firmly believed in women's rights to political representation, and strongly opposed the position taken by James Mill and Thomas Jefferson - that women had identical interests with

their fathers and husbands. ⁽¹²⁶⁾ Certainly, she, herself, felt no obligation to respect the laws to which she had never assented:

I have no vote at elections, though I am a tax-paying housekeeper and responsible citizen; and I regard the disability as an absurdity, seeing that I have for a long course of years influenced public affairs to an extent not professed or attempted by many men. But I do not see that I could do much good by personal complaints, which always have some suspicion or reality of passion in them.

(Martineau H. (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1, p. 402.)

She held to the principle that 'real' freedom meant that individuals should be able to exercise control over their own lives and destinies, and that if restrictions were removed from women, they would eventually achieve power and status within society. Equal political rights for women in a democracy was inevitable.

The principle of the equal rights of both halves of the human race is all we have to do with here. It is the true democratic principle which can never be seriously controverted, and only for a short time evaded. Governments can derive their just powers only from the consent of the governed.

(Martineau H., (1837), *Society in America*, 1, London, Saunders & Otley, p. 206.)

As we saw earlier in this chapter, in the section on sociology, Harriet Martineau frequently drew parallels between the plight of slaves and the condition of women. For example, before travelling to America, she had been optimistic about the position of women in the young democracy though aware of the iniquities of the system of slavery there. On arrival, however, she was struck by the

ambiguities between the principles inherent in the American Constitution and the political status of black people and women. She was, moreover, convinced that the best advocates for the cause of women's rights were happy wives or contented single women (herself, for example?) who had no private injuries to avenge, or axes to grind. Though her views on education and employment were almost identical to those of Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau thought the latter a poor advocate for the cause.

But Mary Wollstonecraft was, with all her powers, a poor victim of passion, with no control over her own peace, and no calmness or content except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied...

Every allowance must be made for Mary Wollstonecraft herself, from the constitution and singular environment which determined her course: but I have never regarded her as a safe example, nor as a successful champion of Woman and her Rights.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1, pp. 400 & 402.)

Harriet Martineau was certain that political equality for women would be assured if the protagonists of women's rights were respected; when women became accepted by the professional and business communities; and when they secured for themselves an active place in society. ⁽¹²⁷⁾ Nevertheless, she was supportive of the first petition for women's suffrage, delivered to parliament by John Stuart Mill in 1866, though its decisive rejection provided confirmation of the efficacy of her caution.

Marriage and Divorce

Harriet Martineau was betrothed in her early twenties, and presumably at that time, was not hostile to her own involvement in the institution of marriage. There is no account of her feelings at the time of her fiance's death, but thirty years later, in her *Autobiography*, she was to express relief at her continued spinsterhood. Certainly if she had married, her life would have been very different and any sort of literary career would have been unlikely.

It was happiest for both of us that our union was prevented by any means. I am, in truth, very thankful for not having married at all. I have never since been tempted, nor have suffered anything at all in relation to that matter which is held to be all important to women, love and marriage.

(*Ibid.*, 1, p. 131)

Her first comments on the institution of marriage were made after her visit to America, in the mid 1830s. Then, as has already been mentioned, she had been struck by the decline in American women after marriage. Further, she measured the state of the institution of marriage against the moral health of society.

The traveller everywhere finds women treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal interest. Any agreement thus formed is imperfect, and is liable to disturbance; and the danger is great in proportion to .

the degradation of the supposed weaker party. The degree of degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country.

(Martineau H., (1838), *How to Observe*, London, Charles Knight, pp. 168-9.)

However, Harriet Martineau's chief contributions to contemporary debates concerning marriage and divorce were made after 1852, when she began writing leaders for the *Daily News*. Then, established and well into her middle years, she was able to withstand challenges to her femininity which might result from her more forthright criticisms of the state of marriage in Britain. Also, long overdue divorce reforms were being considered by parliament. How, she asked her readers in 1853, could they tolerate a marriage compact in which the wife was regarded as the inferior party? How could they continue to ignore the gross injustice of a law which gave a wife no protection, by which her property and earnings could be appropriated by her husband, by which she could be divorced but could not petition for divorce herself, and under which she had no right of appeal or redress?

She referred to the case of Caroline Norton (1808-1877), ⁽¹²⁸⁾ though not by name, as a 'not uncommon' circumstance: 'the case of a lady maintaining by her ability and industry an adulterous husband, who claims all her earnings and threatens the seizure of her whole property'. ⁽¹²⁹⁾ The solution was to change the law so that women could take responsibility for their own debts and obligations: 'after a longer or shorter time, the women of England are sure of

being put in possession, like the women of other countries, of their personal fortunes, and of their earnings of their talents and their toil.' (130)

Also, divorce had to be made more easily attainable. Harriet Martineau took the material view that Victorian marriage was an economic pact and, hence, thought it absurd when it was deemed a permanent and sacramental arrangement. Moreover, since she had witnessed incompatibility and unhappiness in the marriage of others, she felt that divorce should be readily available. However, existing divorce proceedings were currently so expensive and unwieldy, that this in itself discriminated not only against women but against the poor. Accordingly, it was likely to be the poor working class wife, probably subject to beatings, who was most victimized by the existing system. She took a more favourable view of the divorce laws in Scotland.

In Scotland, there were ninety-five cases in the five years from 1836 to 1841, while in England there have been 110 from the first day of this century until now. Of the ninety-five Scotch divorces, one third were at the suit of the wife; whereas in England the wife cannot seek a divorce at all, except in cases of unnatural atrocity; so that only four successful suits are on record. In Scotland, the parties in the ninety-five cases were almost all from the labouring classes, the expense being from £15 to £30, whereas in England, divorce is wholly out of the reach of all but the rich - the expense rising from £500 to many thousands.

(Martineau H., (1853), Daily News, 25 March.)

Divorce, she argued, should be granted according to need, and not to financial status or sex. (131)

When the laws were finally changed in 1857, she noted with some satisfaction that women could now request a judicial separation and that they were also entitled to keep hold of their own earnings - women were at last being acknowledged as 'bread-winners'. Once more she focused on the economic rather than the political as the way forward for women. The problem was that legislation still did not reflect the changes in employment patterns, particularly of women.

By the changes in our marriage law much more happiness is caused than belongs to the mere relief of a certain number of sufferers, hitherto hopeless...We shall hear no more of the absolutely unendurable cases; and for all the hardest there is more or less remedy now provided.

The benefit...under the reform of our marriage law is the full, practical recognition of women as "breadwinners"...But the fact is, and has been, that a vast proportion - some say nineteen-twentieths - of the women of the kingdom work for their bread, although our laws remain applicable to a very different state of society, to a social state in which nearly every woman was maintained by husband, father, mother or kinsman.

(Martineau H., (1858), *Daily News*, 28 May.)

The Repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts

Harriet Martineau was not afraid to tackle the controversial issues of the nineteenth century, including birth control, divorce and prostitution. She sympathised with prostitutes rather than their clients, and thought that the licensing of prostitutes in order to protect their clientele would simply condone and perpetuate the evil. In 1863, she questioned whether 'the sin and disease in question can be dealt with only by a system of police regulation; that is, by the establishment of a systematic registration of

prostitutes, and inspection for the purposes of preventing the spread of disease.' (132)

She had been, thus, horrified when she first heard about the possibilities of such legislation, and wholly condemnatory of its eventual passage. The first Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1864, directed that women in garrison towns could be stopped in the streets, summarily arrested as prostitutes, imprisoned, forcibly examined and if found to be diseased, confined to a designated, secured hospital. The second Act, passed two years later, eradicated anomalies and extended the geographical area of imposition of the Acts.

It is difficult to explain why attempts to legislate against venereal disease surfaced in Britain in the 1860s. Walkowitz suggests that this was a reflection both of a concern for the high incidence of venereal disease in the British army (in 1864, one out of three sick cases had been diagnosed as venereal in origin) and enthusiasm for intervention into the lives of the poor on medical and sanitary grounds. (133) Most strikingly, the rhetoric underpinning the legislation revealed the sexual double standards which riddled mid-Victorian culture. Arguments such as the following prevailed:

We may at once dispose of any recommendations founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and

the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.

(Report, (1871), Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1866-69,, quoted in Walkowitz J., (1980), *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 71)

Despite Florence Nightingale's opposition to the Acts, and it was she who alerted Harriet Martineau to their damaging potential, ⁽¹³⁴⁾ there was little public antagonism to them until Josephine Butler embarked upon her campaign in the 1870s and 1880s. The Contagious Diseases Acts were finally repealed in 1886.

Harriet Martineau's four letters, all published in the *Daily News* in September 1863 (4, 15, 20, 25), before the Acts became law, were the first shots fired in one of the main British feminist campaigns of the nineteenth century. The debt that the movement owed to her was acknowledged later in Josephine Butler's autobiography. ⁽¹³⁵⁾ In the letters, presumably written as letters rather than editorials because of the 'delicate' nature of the content, Harriet Martineau advanced the following arguments against the suggested legislation. The remedy for venereal disease lay in moral rather than in preventive measures. The best ways of tackling the problem were to remove temptation from soldiers by keeping them busy, active and occupied, and also healthy and well fed. Moreover, if the Acts were passed, there was no guarantee that they would prevent disease. But they would imply state support and approval of immorality and they would force the intervention of civilians in military affairs.

Harriet Martineau was particularly critical of Victorian conviction of the unremitting nature of male sexuality: in the case of the military, the perceived necessity for the gratification of the soldier's sexual appetites [his 'animalism'] was 'to be provided for like his need of food and clothing':

This admission of the necessity of the vice is the point on which the whole argument turns, and on which irretrievable consequences depend. Once admitted, the necessity of a long series of fearful evils follows of course. There can be no resistance to seduction, procuration, brothels, disease and methods of regulation, *when once the original necessity is granted*. Further, the admission involves civil as well as military society, and starts them together on the road which leads down to what the moralists of all ages and nations have called the lowest hell.

(Martineau H., (1863), *Daily News*, 20 September.) (136)

Nearly a year later, in July 1864, she felt able to reintroduce the issue to the *Daily News* readership once more. In a leader in July 1854, she apologised for the awkwardness of the subject but pronounced it her duty as a journalist to warn against legislation which endangered the rights of innocent women. She trusted that her representatives in parliament:

will surely not forget that to pass such a measure as this is to enter on a new and fearful province of legislation, from which we can never withdraw to the previous moral position; and that it is proposed to us to do this while existing laws against brothels and violations of decency in our streets remain unenforced, and while there is evidence in existence of

the operation in other countries of laws for the protection of men from the consequences of their own passions which would make it a less evil to any conscientious member to quit public life than to have the smallest share in bringing down such a curse on his nation and on the moral repute and prospects of his country.

(Martineau, (1864), *Daily News*, 2 July.)

One of her last actions for the campaign was to sign a letter, along with Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler and twenty eight prominent women, from the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in the *Daily News* in 1869.

(137)

Despite poor health, Harriet Martineau continued to support Josephine Butler's campaign by writing posters and contributing 'fancy work'. Also, in collaboration with John Stuart Mill and other feminist activists, she helped to mount a challenge against Sir Henry Storks, a supporter of the Acts when he ran against a repealer in a Colchester by-election in 1870. Colchester was one of the garrison towns under the jurisdiction of the Acts. The *Daily News* letters of 1863 were reprinted in pamphlet form, and a poster in the form of a letter from Harriet Martineau, Ursula Bright and Josephine Butler, was addressed to the women of Colchester. (138) Though without voting power, the women of Colchester were urged to 'lift up your voices within your homes and neighbourhoods, against being ruled by lawmakers like the authors of these Acts; in other words, against Henry Storks as candidate for Colchester'. (139)

The publicity was effective and Storks, the official Liberal Party candidate, failed to be elected. The loss of the seat made the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, reconsider the Acts and a parliamentary commission was constituted for this purpose. When it voted 13 to 6 for repeal and proposed new legislation the repealers were jubilant. Sir John Richard Robinson, the *Daily News* editor, wrote to congratulate Harriet Martineau. 'You have done more than anyone, I really believe, to defeat the plans of the military.'

(140) But with characteristic honesty, she pencilled the margin of his letter with the private comment, 'No, Mrs Butler'. In the event the congratulations were premature as the new bill was introduced too late in the parliamentary session to complete its passage. And, as already been noted, the Acts were not finally repealed until 1886, a decade and a half later.

In summary, Harriet Martineau's approach to women's issues was often contradictory. Her outspokenness on some issues, for example, on the Contagious Diseases Acts and on marriage and divorce reform, appears remarkably advanced. On the other hand, her concern that the natural destination for most women would be the home and her suspicion of women's rights legislation, denotes a conservative strand to her feminism. For decades she addressed the 'Woman Question' almost alone. Yet, in middle-age, she began to realise that others, the 'Woman Missionaries' as Florence Nightingale had called them, (141) were outpacing her. In a reply to Florence Nightingale she admitted that 'I am with them [the "Women Missionaries"] so far as to assert this benefit - of everybody being

allowed to do their best to help people to find out what they can do and do it - But I detest all setting up of Rights and unnecessary divisions of Men and Women's work'. (142)

In the end, her writing on women's issues provides insights into the thoughts of one of the most eminent intellectuals of the nineteenth century whose interests reflected the fact that she was a woman. And her discussions, for example, on the state of nineteenth century marriage and the need for divorce reform are as fresh and as pertinent in the late twentieth century as they no doubt were, at the time they were written.

* * * * *

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, I have found it necessary to present the range and diversity of Harriet Martineau's work before attempting to make an assessment. Because of the large number of areas in which she excelled, it is not my intention to try simply to trace a biographical path or pattern through her life. The intention, rather, is to present a multi-faceted understanding of her intellectual and political contributions against the context of the social and cultural specificity of her life.

Harriet Martineau was best known to her contemporaries as a populariser and proponent of political economy and the aspect of this work which is most interesting concerns how it reflects the popular economic arguments of her day. Her writing on education is

of similar interest in that it provides insights into the broad range of reform issues on the agenda of early and mid-nineteenth century educationists and politicians, and, in particular, into the growing influence of the state. Significantly, the education reforms Harriet Martineau advocated were 'progressive', humanistic, and anti-authoritarian.

Harriet Martineau was also the foremost woman journalist of her time, and as such, her work in this area is more personally illuminating. The extracts chosen for this chapter show that she wrote accessibly and with candour on a wide range of contemporary issues. Her contributions to sociology, history and literature are also considerable, not least because they offer an indication of the inter-disciplinary debates thought necessary in the past to fully understand the human condition. As I shall argue later, one of the most important reasons for taking Harriet Martineau as a focus for this thesis concerns what she can show us about the value and importance of similar cross-disciplinary dialogues and discussions.

Harriet Martineau is most impressive, however, in her contributions to autobiography and her advocacy of equality for women. In the first instance, she offers a wonderfully acerbic portrayal of nineteenth century intellectual life. As an advocate of the new science of Positivism, she was not interested in providing flattering portrayals of her contemporaries; rather she was concerned to tell the truth. 'My opinions and feelings have been remarkably open to the world; and my position has been such as to

impose no reserves on a disposition naturally open and communicative.' (143) Whether she was able to achieve this level of objectivity is debatable. However today's readers of the Autobiography can, with the benefit of Harriet Martineau's more than usually critical eye, re-visit and reassess the preoccupations and achievements of the law-makers and intelligentsia of mid-nineteenth century England.

As a feminist campaigner, Harriet Martineau's analysis of the condition of women and her prioritisation of the economic over the political, highlights the fact that she has been enormously undervalued as a feminist theorist. It is true that she acknowledged the importance of political representation for women (and for black people in the United States). However, she also understood the greater necessity for material ie economic and legal, improvements in the condition of women, both in the labour market and within the home, if genuine sexual equality was to be achieved. Moreover, she saw it as the responsibility of women themselves to make sure that these changes were identified, planned and implemented. Over a century later, Harriet Martineau's position seems equally valid. With the struggle for the vote long passed, women are still fighting for the improvements in employment and education which Harriet Martineau advocated.

NOTES

1. Stephen L. & Lees S., (eds.), (1882), 'Harriet Martineau', *Dictionary of National Biography*, 12, (1921-2 edn.), London, Oxford University Press, pp. 1194-9
2. Dentith S., (1983), 'Political economy, fiction and the language of practical ideology in nineteenth century England', *Social History*, 8, 2, pp. 183-199.
3. Webb R. K., (1960), *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*, London, Heinemann, p. 108.
4. Martineau H., (1832), 'On the duty of studying political economy', *Monthly Repository*, 6, pp. 24-34.
5. Marcet H., (1816), *Conversations in Political Economy: in Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained*, London, Longman.
6. Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*. 1, London, Smith, Elder and Co., p. 121.
7. Mill J., (1821), *Elements of Political Economy*, 1844 edn., reprinted 1963, New York, Augustus M. Kelley.
8. Martineau H., (1834), *Illustrations of Political Economy*, London, Charles Fox. The story titles were as follows:
I. Life in the Wilds; II. The Hill and the Valley; III. Brooke and Brooke Farm; IV. Demerara; V. Ella of Garveloch; VI. Weal and Woe in Garveloch; VII. A Manchester Strike; VIII. Cousin Marshall; IX. Ireland; X. Homes Abroad; XI. For Each and All; XII. French Wine and Politics; XIII. The Charmed Sea; XIV. Berkeley the Banker - Part I; XV. Berkeley the Banker - Part II; XVI. Messrs. Vanderput and Snoek; XVII. The Loom and the Lugger - Part I; XVIII. The Loom and the Lugger - Part II; XIX. Sowers Not Reapers; XX. Cinammon and Pearls; XXI. A Tale of the Tyne; XXII. Briery Creek; XXIII. The Three Ages; XXIV. The Farrers of Budge-Row; XXV. The Moral of Many Fables.
9. Smith A., (1776) *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, London, T. Cadell; Malthus T. (1798), *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, 1890 edn., London, Ward Lock & Co.; Mill J., *op cit*.
10. Martineau H. (1833), *Poor Laws and Paupers*, London, Charles Fox; Martineau H., (1834), *Illustrations of Taxation*, London, Charles Fox.
11. Thomson D., (1973), *Adam Smith's Daughters*, New York, Exposition Press, p. 3.
12. Martineau, (1834), *op cit*. 2, p.140.

13. Martineau H., (1869), *Biographical Sketches*, London, Macmillan and Co.
14. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, p. 233.
15. Martineau, (1869), *op cit.*, p. 307,.
16. Letter from John Stuart Mill to Walter Coulson, November 22 1850, in Lord Robbins, (1970), *The Evolution of Modern Economic Theory*, London, Macmillan & Co., p. 125. John Stuart Mill's own work on the subject entitled *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) is included in Lerner M., (ed.), (1961), *Essential Works of John Stuart Mill*, New York, Bantam Books
17. Martineau H., (1823), 'On Female Education'. *Monthly Repository*, 18, February, pp. 77-81. This article was signed 'Discipulus' as were many of Harriet Martineau's early articles for the *Monthly Repository*.
18. Watts R. E., (1980), 'The Unitarian contribution to the development of female education', *History of Education*, 9, 4, pp. 273-286.
19. Martineau H., (1832), 'National Education', *Monthly Repository*, 6, p. 694.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 22 March.
22. Martineau H., (1861), *Daily News*, 24 September.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Martineau H., (1849), *Household Education*, London, Edward Moxon, p. 86.
25. Martineau H., (1854), *Daily News*, 13 June.
26. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 5 May.
27. Martineau H., (1857), *Daily News*, 5 June.
28. Watts, *op cit.*
29. Delamont S. & Duffin L., (1978), *The Nineteenth Century Woman: her Cultural and Physical World*, London, Croom Helm.
30. Martineau H., (1859), 'Female Industry', *Edinburgh Review*, 222, pp. 293-336.
31. See, for example, Martineau H., (1855), *Daily News*, 26 November

32. Martineau H., (1864), 'Middle class education in England: girls', *The Cornhill Magazine*, 10, November, p. 556.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 549.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 565.
35. Martineau H., (1856), *Daily News*, 29 November.
36. Martineau H., (1854), *Daily News*, 5 July. Here, Harriet Martineau makes the case for the paid employment of women as nurses.
37. Among Harriet Martineau's papers in the University of Birmingham library there is a copy of the summons issued by Sophia Jex Blake against the Senate and the Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh for not permitting the matriculation ie enrolment, of women in the University's School of Medicine: MS 1378, 23 May 1872, Harriet Martineau's Papers, Birmingham University Library.
38. Medical Education for Women: Lists of Executive, Edinburgh and General Committees, 23 May 1872. Committee members included Harriet Martineau, her brother James, and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Lydia Becker, Madame Bodichon, Jessie Boucherett, Mrs. Butler, Mary Carpenter, Frances Power Cobb, Charles Darwin, Emily Davies, Henry and Mrs. Fawcett, Frances Galton, the Jex-Blake family, John Stuart Mill, and Miss Shirreff among other notables.
39. Martineau, (1823), *op cit.*
40. Martineau H., (1866), *Daily News*, 31 January. In this, one of her last leaders for the *Daily News*, Harriet Martineau argues for the necessity of schools for nurses.
41. Haight G. S. (ed.), (1854-5), *George Eliot Letters*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2, p. 32.
42. Chapman M. Weston, (1877), *Memorials*, London, Smith, Elder & Co.
43. Webb R. K., (1959), *A Handlist of Contributions to the Daily News by Harriet Martineau*, unpublished, available in the British Newspaper Library. In the introduction to the Handlist, Webb notes Harriet Martineau's archival tendencies. Apparently Webb checked his list, culled from numerous contemporary references, against the contents of a tin trunk owned by Sir Wilfred Martineau and noticed that the 'cuttings were arranged chronologically in packets, each covering six months; each cutting was dated in Miss Martineau's handwriting.'
44. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 2, p. 415.
45. Letter from Harriet Martineau to Lord Carlisle, 7 December 1855, quoted in Webb, *op cit.*, p. 315.

46. Martineau H., (1855), *Daily News*, 6 December. She also wrote about the army in 1859 in the volume *England and her Soldiers*, London, Smith, Elder & Co.
47. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 20 May.
48. Martineau H., (1838), *How to Observe*, London, Charles Knight;; Martineau H., (1848), *Eastern Life, Past and Present*, London, Edward Moxon.
49. Pichanick V. K. , (1981), *Harriet Martineau: the Woman and her Work 1802-1876*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, p. 211.
50. Martineau H., (1857), *British Rule in India*, Smith, Elder & Co., pp. 124-135, 180-183.
51. Quoted in Miller F. Fenwick, (1884), *Harriet Martineau*, London, W. H. Allen, p. 100.
52. Martineau H., (1854), *Daily News*, 8 July.
53. Martineau H., (1862), *Daily News*, 17 & 21 July.
54. Pichanick, (1981), *op cit.*, p. 219.
55. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 28 June.
56. *Ibid.*. Harriet Martineau's position on labour relations was rehearsed many times in the *Daily News*: see also, (1853) 17 February, 26 March, 16 June, 21 October, 1 November; (1854), 17 March; (1857), 30 January; (1859) 19 September, 3 October; (1860) 20 August; (1864) 5 April, 8 December; (1865), 18 January.
57. Webb, *op cit.*, p. 316. Webb evaluates Harriet Martineau's work as a journalist thus: 'Her work has relevance, urgency, cogency, and impatience with muddled situations, those characteristics of good journalism which must mark any paper which would inform opinion and influence policy.'
58. Martineau, (1869), *op cit.*
59. Martineau H., (1868), *Edinburgh Review*, 128, July, pp. 1-47.
60. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 28 July. Harriet Martineau seemed to be particularly interested in 'arterial drainage'. In this fairly typical leader on the subject, she argues that recent floods could have been prevented if there had been 'a wise co-operation with Nature, under the form of control of her forces. What individuals have done there [in the "fenny districts"]', individuals may do elsewhere.'
61. Rossi A. S., (1974), 'The first woman sociologist: Harriet Martineau 1802-76', in Rossi A. S., (ed.), *The Feminist Papers: from Adams to De Beauvoir*, New York, Bantam, p. 124.

62. Riedesel P., (1981), 'Who Was Harriet Martineau?', *Journal of the History of Sociology*, 3, 2, p.77.
63. Martineau H., (1837), *Society in America*, London, Saunders & Otley.
64. Ibid., 3, pp. 105-151. In this section, Harriet Martineau scrutinises the social, economic, occupational and marital position of American women far more rigorously than she was ever to attempt in respect of their British counterparts.
65. Martineau, (1838), op cit.
66. Lipset S. M., (1962), 'Harriet Martineau's America', in Martineau H., *Society in America*, New York, Doubleday.
67. Martineau, (1838), op cit..
68. Martineau, (1837), op cit., 1, p. 149.
69. Ibid., p. 200.
70. Ibid., p. 110.
71. Riedesel P., (1980), 'Harriet Martineau and the birth of sociology', *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*, 8, 1, p. 61.
72. Miller, op cit., p. 218
73. Thorne J. O. & Collocott T. C. (eds.), (1974), *Biographical Dictionary*, 1, Edinburgh, W. & R. Chambers, p. 303.
74. Riedesel, 1981, op cit.
75. Rossi, op cit.
76. Martineau H., (1849-50), *History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace 1816-46*, London, Charles Knight.
77. Webb, op cit., p. 277.
78. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 2, pp. 316-323.
79. Martineau H., (1851), *Introduction to the History of the Peace: from 1800-1815*, London, Charles Knight.
80. Martineau H., (1864), *The History of England from the Commencement of the XIXth Century to the Crimean War*, Philadelphia, Porter & Coates.
81. Halevy E., (1924), *The History of the English People in 1815*, 3, London, Pelican.
82. See, for example, Martineau, (1849-50), op cit., p. 194.

83. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 1, pp. 271-297 for a description of her 'lionisation' by London society immediately after the publication of the Illustrations.
84. Young G. M., (1936), *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p.8.
85. See, for example, Martineau, (1849-50), op cit., 1, pp. 432-4.
86. Ibid.
87. Pichanick, (1981), op cit., p. 155.
88. Martineau H., undated MS 1406, British Museum Library.
89. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 1, p. 210.
90. Letter from Harriet Martineau to G. J. Holyoake, 15 February 1855, Holyoake Papers, British Museum.
91. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 1. p. 11.
92. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 2, p. 243.
93. Martineau H., (1839), *Deerbrook*, London, Edward Moxon.
94. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 2, p. 234.
95. Pichanick, (1981), op cit., p. 202, and also p. 238-243.
96. Shumaker W., (1954), *English Autobiography - its Emergence, Materials and Form*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
97. Winston E., (1980), 'The Autobiographer and Her Readers: from apology to affirmation', in Jelinek E. C. (ed.) *Women's Autobiography*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 112-132.
98. Sanders V., (1986b), '"Absolutely an act of duty": choice of profession in autobiographies by Victorian women', *Prose Studies*, 9, 3, December, pp. 54-70.
99. Ibid.
100. Virago reprinted the first two volumes of the *Autobiography* in 1983, with new introductions by Gaby Weiner.
101. Martineau, (1839), op cit.; Martineau H., (1841a), *The Hour and the Man*, London, Edward Moxon; Martineau H., (1841b), *The Playfellow Series*, (The Settlers at Home, The Prince and the Peasant, Feats on the Flord, The Crofton Boys), London, Charles Knight & Co.
102. Unattributed, (1839), *Athenaeum*, 597, 6, April, pp. 254-6

103. Showalter E., (1978), *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, London, Virago Press, p. 19.

104. Colby V., (1974), *Yesterday's Women*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 212. Colby writes:

The shifting of attention from aristocrat to middle-class family life, from leaders of men to simply employers of men - businessmen, matrons managing their servants, governesses educating their children, clergymen guiding their flock - all this was the material of Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope as much as of the Brontes, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, and - to put her in such exalted company - Harriet Martineau.

105. Figes E., (1982), *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Novelists to 1850*, London, Macmillan

106. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, p. 400.

107. Letter from Charlotte Bronte to Harriet Martineau, quoted in Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 2, p. 323.

108. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 2, p. 159.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 161. The Prince and the Peasant, Harriet Martineau wrote, was the least popular of The Playfellow tales, 'except among poor people who read it with wonderful eagerness. Some of them called it "the French revelation"'. It was, she reported, the most 'thumbed' in lending libraries.

110. J. M. Dent (London) produced one of the most recent reprints of *Feats on the Fiord* in 1953, with illustrations by the noted illustrator, Arthur Rackham.

111. Thomas G., (1985), *Harriet Martineau*, Boston, Mass., G. K. Hall & Co.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

113. Showalter, *op cit.*, p. 19.

114. Eisenstein Z., (1981), *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, London, Longman.

115. Yates G. G. (1985), *Harriet Martineau on Women*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.

116. Banks O. (1981), *Faces of Feminism: a Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, p. 38. Banks claims that the Langham Place Group was so inspired by Harriet Martineau's 1859 'Female Industry' article in *The Edinburgh Review* that it founded the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women.

117. Pichanick V. K., (1977), 'An abominable submission: Harriet Martineau's views on the role and place of women', *Women's Studies*, 5, 1, p. 14.
118. Martineau, (1859), *op cit.*, pp. 293-336.
119. Martineau H., (1863), *Daily News*, (4 letters: September 4, 15, 20 & 25).
120. Martineau H., (1856), *Daily News*, 2 April.
121. Martineau, (1859), *op cit.*, p. 109.
122. Quoted in Yates, *op cit.*, p. 208.
123. Martineau H., (1861), *Health, Husbandry and Handicraft*, London, Bradbury & Evans.
124. Martineau H., (1863), 'Life in the Criminal Class', *Edinburgh Review*, 322, October, pp. 337-371.
125. Pichanick, (1977), *op cit.*, p. 20.
126. Martineau, (1837), *op cit.*, 1, p. 149.
127. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, pp. 400-402.
128. Caroline Norton was a writer and campaigner for women's rights. Her activities to improve women's legal position stemmed from her personal marital experiences and concentrated on the rights of mothers to their children, and of wives to keep their own property. After the passage of the Infant Custody Bill (1839), she was reunited with her own children. She was also involved in campaigns which helped bring about the passage of the Marriage and Divorce Act (1857) and the first Married Women's Property Bill (1882).
129. Martineau H., (1853), *Daily News*, 25 March.
130. Martineau H., (1856), *Daily News*, 26 March.
131. These views were reiterated by Harriet Martineau in the *Daily News*; (1853), 8 September; (1854), 28 June.
132. Martineau H., (1863), *Daily News*, 20 September, letter.
133. Walkowitz J., (1980), *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 69-89.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
135. Butler J., (1898), *Personal Reminiscences of the Great Crusade*, London, Marshall.

136. Martineau H., (1870), *Contagious Diseases Acts*, Liverpool, T. Brackell, reprint of the 1863 Daily News letters.
137. Reproduced in Chapman, *op cit.*, p. 430.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 433-434.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 434-5.
140. Letter from J. R. Robinson to Harriet Martineau, 22 May 1871, Harriet Martineau Papers, MS 758, University of Birmingham Library,
141. Letter from Florence Nightingale to Harriet Martineau, 30 November 1858, Florence Nightingale Papers, British Museum Library.
142. Reply from Harriet Martineau to Florence Nightingale, 3 December 1858, Florence Nightingale Papers, British Museum Library.
143. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, p. 3.

CHAPTER 3

A SURVEY OF THE COMMENTARIES ON HARRIET MARTINEAU'S WORK

In the last chapter, I presented Harriet Martineau's work in its complex diversity. In the relatively few years since the publication of that work, there has been an analogous diversity of commentaries about her work. In this chapter, I present the perspectives and evaluations of Harriet Martineau's work by other commentators, researchers and biographers who have offered a variety of viewpoints on her life and work.

The commentaries and biographies are grouped into six sections, each representing a particular period during or after Harriet Martineau's lifetime. They are, as follows: 1820-1876, responses to her writing and actions during her lifetime; 1876-7, obituaries immediately after her death; 1877-1914, biographical accounts including those emerging from the 'first-wave' women's movement; 1914-1939, biographical accounts during the inter-war years; 1940-1970, biographies pre-dating the modern women's movement; from 1970 to the present, 'second-wave' feminist perspectives. There is a particular concentration of material in the last decades of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, paralleling the developments of the two main feminist movements.

1820-1876: Harriet Martineau's Contemporaries

Harriet Martineau's contemporaries may have disagreed about the quality of her contribution to British nineteenth century culture and ideas: but few cast doubt on her importance or her influence. She was admired and honoured by those such as Jacob Holyoake, the secularist, Francis Place, champion of nineteenth-century radicalism, and the feminist writers for the English Woman's Journal, all of whom shared her 'advanced' perspective on the world. She drew criticism and sometimes cruel caricatures from those who disagreed with her views, including members of the Tory press in Fraser's Magazine and the Quarterly Review, as we shall see later. And, by the rest, she was regarded as an eminent, if unusual and eccentric, woman. It is clear from the observations of her contemporaries that Harriet Martineau was judged as much on her femininity as on her intellectual or reforming achievements. Her supporters pronounced on the extent of her womanliness and her detractors were quick to identify deficiencies in her femininity. For others she was almost unsexed, an eccentric legend in her lifetime with the merits and failings that such a label brings.

Among the foremost of Harriet Martineau's sympathisers was Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906), the reformer and founder of Secularism, who admired both her 'masculine' mind and her womanly attributes. He appreciated her 'genius which may be truly called masculine', and the womanliness in her commitment to the private, domestic sphere.

In spite of the vigour and grasp of her intellect, she is a true woman and proclaims Home as peculiarly the female sphere of action. We claim for her a place beside, but higher in the moral scale, such women as Mesdames De Stael and Roland in France, Mrs. Child in America, Madam Palzow in Germany and our own Mary Wollstonecraft and Mrs. Somerville. Each of these writers has asserted women's equality of genius and equality of social right with the sterner sex, but neither of them has attempted to invade men's peculiar province as the law-makers and conservers of public morality and national honour.

(Holyoake J., (1857), Holyoake Papers, British Museum, pp 9-11)

Another of her associates was Francis Place (1771-1874), a fellow Radical and leading figure in the agitation which brought about the passage of the 1832 Reform Bill. During an exchange of letters on the publication of the Illustrations, Place wrote Harriet Martineau what amounted to a fan letter in which he found her brave and honest and esteemed her greatly. Her particular merit, according to Place, was her courage in investigating cases where others were cowards and in her 'exhilarating' writing. For example, he was much impressed by the last of the Illustration tales:

If I were a rich man there should not be an Institution or a public library or a Book Club of any sort stationery or perambulating without copies of your tales, and abundance of the 'last and best', the 'Moral of Many Tales'. I know of no work so practically valuable as this little book combining as it does 'principles with practice'.

(Place F., (1834), Letter to Harriet Martineau, 4 March, British Museum)

The early feminist publication, the English Woman's Journal, was more muted in its praise but nonetheless regarded Harriet Martineau as an early pioneer in the cause of women. She had undoubtedly

earned parity with the opposite sex, particularly in her work on political economy. 'Miss Martineau has made that most practical and unimaginative of studies, Political Economy, as attractive as the most interesting fictions of Romance'. (1)

Later, the journal which was to give much publicity to the 1859 'Female Industry' article, again pronounced its admiration of the 'revolutionary' achievements of an experienced activist.

Miss Martineau laboured to impress upon the people the duties of self-reliance and prudence in marriages, at a time when the great truths of political economy were scorned and derided by all classes of English statesmen, and were thought too 'low' and revolutionary to be even mentioned in a journal so respectable as the 'Saturday Review'.

(Unattributed, (1859), 'The Reviewer Reviewed', English Woman's Journal, May, p. 202)

As already mentioned, Harriet Martineau drew criticism from those who did not share her political philosophy or secular interests. Yet, even in the scurrilous, if occasionally humorous, portrayal of the author of the Illustrations in Fraser's Magazine in 1833, Harriet Martineau's power to influence is assumed, even if her Utilitarian politics is derided.

She is, of course, the idol of the Westminster Review, and other oracles of that peculiar party; which by all persons but themselves, is held to be the most nauseous mixture of the absurd and the abominable that ever existed...Here is Harriet Martineau in full enjoyment of economical philosophy; her tea things, her ink-bottle, her skillet, her scuttle, her chair,

are all of the Utilitarian model; and the cat, on whom she bestows her kindest caresses, is a cat who has been trained to the utmost propriety of manners by that process of instructions which we should think the most efficient on all such occasions.

(Unattributed, (1833), 'Miss Harriet Martineau', *Fraser's Magazine*, 152, November, p. 576)

The *Quarterly Review* used stronger language to ridicule the author of the *Illustrations*, not only for poor quality of writing and misplaced reforming zeal but on the grounds of 'unfemininity'.

But it is equally possible not to laugh at the absurd trash which is seriously propounded by some of her characters, in dull didactic dialogues; introduced here and there in the most clumsy manner; and worst of all, it is quite impossible not to be shocked, nay disgusted, with many of the unfeminine and mischievous doctrines on the principles of social welfare; of which these tales are made the vehicle.

(Croker J. W., (1833), 'Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels', *Quarterly Review*, 1107, April, p. 136)

Others were also critical of the *Illustrations*, but expressed their reservations in a milder form. For example, John Sterling commented on the absurdity of her portrayal of the West Indies in *Demerara*, 'wrong on cultivation, wrong on the Negroes', and Ward of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, worried about her role as a propagandist of Utilitarian ideas. ⁽²⁾

It will come as no surprise however that the most intense vitriolic was reserved for occasions when, as a woman, she wrote about 'unwomanly' topics in *Ella of Garveloch* ⁽³⁾ viz. population control and celibacy as a solution to overcrowding and unemployment. The

Quarterly Review was outraged. 'But no;- such a character is nothing to a female Malthusian. A woman who thinks child-bearing is a crime against society. An unmarried woman who declaims against marriage'. (4) To atone, she was instructed to burn all her books except for one or two, abstain from writing until she had mastered a better set of principles and improve her style of writing by studying the work of Maria Edgeworth, the popular novelist. Fraser's Magazine was no less outraged, denouncing 'that is indeed a wonder that such themes should occupy the pen of any lady, old or young, without exciting disgust nearly approaching horror'. (5)

Such immoderate responses to the Illustrations inevitably led to a defence of the work. There was much sympathy for Harriet from her friends at what must have been a difficult time for her, and some support for her from the literary community. For example, Richard Henry Horne's noted work *Spirit of the Age*, which appeared in 1844, suggested that the Quarterly Review had not only misunderstood Harriet Martineau's 'unshackled spirit' and 'mind keenly alive to perceptions of all outward things' but had acted in an ungentlemanly way. 'The choice of such a class of subjects gave rise to all matter of imputations. The 'Quarterly Review'...while enlarging on what did not appear as 'feminine', certainly forgot what was gentlemanly.' (6)

Despite these machinations, the Illustrations were clearly a success, if popular acclaim and high sales can be taken as indicators. And the response of the *literati* was generally

enthusiastic. The Norwich Mercury wrote of 'delicacy of perception' and Lucy Aikin (1781-1864), historian and writer, commented on the grace, animation and pathos of the stories. William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), the eminent American Unitarian minister with whom Miss Aikin corresponded, dissented from the doctrines yet expressed delight with the stories. ⁽⁷⁾ The Spectator was most flattering about the work of this 'benefactor of the species', and Henry Brougham (1778-1868), law reformer and founder of the Edinburgh Review, to whose behaviour Harriet drew attention in the Autobiography as we have already seen, urged that the Review should point out how extensively used the tales should be. Of her, he wrote, 'she is as prolific as Scott, she reasons as well as A. Smith, and she has the best feelings, and, generally, the most correct principles of any of our political economists'. ⁽⁸⁾ To the Athenaeum, she was learned without being 'blue', and capable of writing with feeling and truth without lapsing into sentimentality, unlike other writers of her sex. ⁽⁹⁾

Some of her other publications were equally well received. Her two novels Deerbrook (1839) and The Hour and the Man (1841) were much admired when they appeared. The latter, an anti-slavery novel, was considered a noble enterprise. It concerned the life of Toussaint l'Ouverture, a black slave who led a rebellion against French rule in Haiti, and was written after her return from a European tour during which she had visited the fortress at Jura where Toussaint had been imprisoned and where he died. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Once again Channing was extremely positive, informing its author that he knew of no grander

conception of heroic character. ⁽¹¹⁾; Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), lawyer and diarist, and friend of Thomas Carlyle, thought it a masterpiece, despite its faults ⁽¹²⁾; and Florence Nightingale called it the finest historical romance in any language. ⁽¹³⁾

The History was also well received on its publication in instalments beginning in 1848, though it was in competition with the first two volumes of Thomas Babington Macaulay's much heralded History of England from the Accession of James II which came out in the same year. ⁽¹⁴⁾ The Athenaeum gave the Martineau work two searching reviews, taking it most seriously: 'Miss Martineau has been able to discuss events which may almost be called contemporary as calmly as if she were examining a remote period of antiquity...She has spared no pains in investigating the truth and allowed no fears to prevent her from stating it.' ⁽¹⁵⁾ George Eliot found it instructive in parts, and indeed one of the most valuable books of the time, but criticised its 'sentimental rhetorical' style. Additionally, the book was not a history in the accepted form but a set of review articles, partly narrative and partly reflection. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Harriet Martineau's contemporaries were also generally well disposed to her writing style. For example, Elizabeth Barrett's early estimate was of Miss Martineau as an 'eloquent writer and lucid thinker...possessing singular powers of description and pathos...the possessor of an original & originating mind endowed with high logic and imaginative sensibility.' ⁽¹⁷⁾ And William Rathbone Greg (1809-1881), noted essayist, admirer and neighbour of Harriet Martineau,

spoke of the 'really almost unrivalled innate powers' of her mind.

(18)

Detractors, it seems, were few although Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855), novelist and dramatist, expressed some reservations. 'Indeed the only things I ever liked of hers were her political economy stories, which I used to read, skipping the political economy.' (19) Later in the century, Harriet Martineau's prose style became less popular. For example, in 1865, H. G. Adams admitted that, while the *Illustrations* had been very popular when they appeared, he doubted whether 'their influence on the public mind was productive of any beneficial improvement. The tales were probably read for amusement; the political notions were forgotten.' (20)

In the same way as contemporary perceptions of the *Illustrations* depended on political affiliation, so too did opinion about Harriet Martineau's position on the 'Woman Question'. As we have already seen, she was pilloried by the Tory press for being an unmarried, childless woman who dared to advocate birth control and celibacy in her Malthusian tales for the *Illustrations*. Yet she was clearly influential among early feminists such as Barbara Bodichon and Jessie Boucherett (founder members of *The English Women's Journal*), and Josephine Butler, campaigner for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases legislation. As we have seen in chapter 2, all drew on her articles to start their own campaigns and all regarded her as an early and important role model for woman.

In contrast, less enlightened contemporaries clearly found her behaviour rather puzzling. They found her power as a woman difficult to accomodate within their own ideological frameworks, and therefore promptly pronounced her as having 'masculine' qualities. Like Francis Place, William Howitt (1792-1879), the Quaker writer and reformer, described Harriet Martineau as 'one of the finest examples of a masculine intellect in a female form which have distinguished the present age'. (21)

Social commentaries on Harriet Martineau's entry into the London scene varied. There was much discussion about her appearance, most of it complimentary. In fact the cruel press caricatures turned out to be counter-productive. Her actual appearance could not but be contrasted favourably to the 'hideous Portrait of her...in the Fraser', reported Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), the historian. He declared that he had been pleasantly surprised by the appearance of such a 'notable literary woman'. 'She pleased us far beyond expectation: she is very intelligent-looking, really of pleasant countenance, was full of talk, tho' unhappily deaf almost as a post, so that you have to speak to her through an ear-trumpet.' (22)

She made a wide circle of friends in London and retained many late into life despite the unpopular instruction to friends in 1843, to destroy her letters to them, and despite her long periods of illness and well-publicised conversions to mesmerism and secularism. (23)

And her devotion to the children of her friends and family, and her

ability to retain the affections of servants and younger nieces and nephews were widely recognised. (24)

It is clear, then, that in the early and mid Victorian periods, Harriet Martineau was regarded as an important figure in English political and cultural life, though later on in the century, from the mid 1860s onwards, her writing became less fashionable. Whether or not commentators agreed with her pronounced political views clearly dictated how valuable they thought her work. She was, therefore, much more highly regarded by social reformers, Radicals and feminists than by the Tory press. The fact that she was a woman working in the public, male sphere always ensured that her gender became central in any advocacy or rebuttal of her views. Nonetheless her fame and success as a political writer and advanced thinker 'unsexed' her to the extent that she was able, as an independent unmarried woman, to participate fully in the London scene before setting up her own establishment in Ambleside.

1876-7: Obituaries and Commentaries

As might be expected, the perceptions of Harriet Martineau's achievements held during her lifetime were reflected in the obituaries written immediately after her death. As in her lifetime, her gender became the battleground upon which her friends and enemies took up their positions. Such associates as Jacob Holyoake and W. R. Greg continued to emphasise both her greatness and her womanliness, whilst critics drew attention to her 'masculine'

qualities. Only those who remembered her most clearly as a reformer and campaigner, for example, Florence Nightingale or members of the emerging feminist movement, concentrated on her achievements rather than the fact that she was a woman.

As we have seen, Harriet Martineau's fame was at a high point throughout the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. Though she continued to write for the *Daily News* well into her old age, her editorials were unsigned so few knew they were written by her. Hence, by the time she died, she had moved out of the public eye: and many of those who knew her at the height of her fame (or notoriety) were also dead. Some of the obituaries, therefore, were by way of a reminder to a new generation.

For Jacob Holyoake, it was Harriet Martineau's achievements as a woman which were of profound importance. Writing in the *National Reformer*, he claimed that she was one of only two women in the nineteenth century (the other was George Sand) 'who have been eminent in the same degree for profound sympathy with religious, social and political progress'.⁽²⁵⁾ In particular, according to Holyoake, the *Autobiography* provided an important account of Harriet Martineau's outstanding career. 'Few narratives could be more interesting to me than this, which traces her career from obscurity to a greater eminence and political eminence than any woman ever attained before in England.'⁽²⁶⁾ In another obituary, this time for *The Index*, he concentrated on her femininity. Not only had

Harriet Martineau been interested in public affairs to the last but she 'was the most womanly of public women I ever knew.' (27)

James Payn (1830-1898), the novelist and writer, continued the twin themes of Harriet Martineau's greatness and womanliness in a letter of condolence to her niece, Jane Martineau. 'I have known all the famous women of our time, and I think that, taking her character all round, your aunt ~~was~~ the greatest among them. The side of her character which I wish to dwell upon as having been overlooked in the notices of her life, was her motherliness, and her keen sense of fun.' (28)

The Autobiography was published immediately after Harriet Martineau's death so occasionally *her obituary and the review of the book* were written simultaneously. As already mentioned in chapter 2, many were shocked by the work's candour and lack of restraint, none more than W. R. Greg. While he was quick to defend Harriet Martineau's character, describing her as 'affectionate' and 'kind-hearted', he believed she had done herself less than justice in the volume.

The tone in which she speaks of at least half her London acquaintances, her sketches of her friends and foes alike, the sovereign contempt in the one set of portraits, the rancorous animosity in the other, and the utter injustice and almost libellous character of many, are probably the features of the book which will leave the most painful impression...It is .

difficult for readers not to receive the impression that Miss Martineau was essentially ill-natured and given to bitterness and depreciation. In conveying this impression she does herself grievous injustice.

(Greg W. R., (1877), 'Harriet Martineau', *Nineteenth Century*, August-December, London, Henry S. King & Co., p. 97)

Clearly Greg felt it difficult to acknowledge, even after her death, that Harriet Martineau could have been anything other than of unblemished character. For those with rather more critical perceptions of her qualities, this was not nearly so problematic. Richardson, in the *Contemporary Review*, suggested that despite her faults Harriet Martineau rather undervalued herself. He thought she was a genius of a sort. 'She denies herself genius, and, using the word in its highest sense, we must admit that the denial speaks only the truth. But if there is such a thing as *interpretive genius*, she was an extra-ordinary instance of it.' (29) However he also felt her to be insensitive - perhaps because of her deafness; lacking moderation in her writing - altogether too candid, frank and truthful; and with an 'austere and morbidly restless conscience'.

Moreover, he considered her writing now to be out of fashion, 'the time is gone when writing like her political stories would create any excitement, or indeed be read'. (30) However her work should be judged not on present interests but by the 'needs of her times'. In the end, Richardson could not pass up the opportunity to question, however mildly, Harriet Martineau's femininity. Even though he could not deny that Harriet Martineau was 'a woman who really and truly found her work and did it well', he expressed

concern about the fact that there were 'so many lines of masculine hardness in it [the Autobiography]' even though 'we are pleased to trace a weakness here and there.' (31)

In another review of Harriet Martineau's work, this time in Blackwood's Magazine, Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), the Scottish novelist, again took up the theme of Harriet Martineau's apparent 'unwomanliness' in a deftly crushing, summary paragraph.

The verdict of the world upon her will not, we think, be so high [as Joan of Arc]. She was a very sensible woman; yet not very much a woman at all, notwithstanding her innocent and honest love of Berlin Wool. She was a very clever writer, with a most useful, servicable working faculty, and as little nonsense in her as could be desired.

(Oliphant M., (1877), 'Harriet Martineau', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 121, April, p. 490)

The implication here was a woman who was active in the public sphere could not achieve full acceptance. On the one hand, her professional status rendered her unfeminine. On the other, the qualities she brought to her profession as a woman could only be serviceable or useful. Moreover, the same review implied that Harriet Martineau could only have anticipated the rough treatment she endured during the publication of the Illustrations. She had strayed, unlike other women writers of the time (Mrs. Oliphant perhaps?), into the field of politics 'and accordingly the same means then in vogue to bring down political opponents of all kinds, were used freely on her.' (32)

The most respectful and considered evaluations of Harriet Martineau's work came for those, particularly women, who shared her campaigning interests and appreciated her continuous efforts for reform. Florence Nightingale, who had sought help from Harriet's journalist pen on several occasions as we have seen, seemed more sensitive than others in her appreciation of her contemporary's work. In a letter of condolence to Florence Weston Chapman, Miss Nightingale displayed a sympathy, which perhaps she herself shared, with Harriet's wish to do something important with her life.

She was born to be a destroyer of slavery, in whatever form, in whatever place, all over the world, wherever she saw it or thought she saw it...The thought actually inspired her, whether in the degraded offspring of former English poor-law, of English serfdom forty years ago, - in any shape; whether in the fruits of any abuse, - social, legislative, or administrative, - or in actual slavery; or be it in the Contagious Diseases Acts, or no matter what, she rose to the occasion.

(Letter from Florence Nightingale to Florence Weston Chapman, 29 June 1876, quoted in Chapman F. W., (1877), *Memorials*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., p. 479)

Florence Nightingale's respect for Harriet Martineau's achievements was shared by others of a more feminist persuasion. As might be expected the *Englishwoman's Review* carried a long and affectionate appreciation on its front page, immediately after Harriet Martineau's death. She was pronounced 'one of greatest women that our generation has known, an able writer, a warm-hearted philanthropist...When she was in the zenith of her fame, few English writers, certainly no other woman, exercised so great an influence on public opinion.' (33)

The review was laudatory though fair, attention being drawn to Harriet Martineau's political economy tales as well as to her novels and travel books. However, most interest was expressed in her impact on the 'Woman Question', and particularly, in her declaration in *Society in America* that women as well as black people should be politically represented. The review also claimed that she had planned to establish a women's paper after her return from America, and acknowledged her contribution to recent thinking on girls' education. (34)

In summary, the patterns of commentary on Harriet Martineau's work established during her lifetime, continued after she died. She was commended by those who shared her views, though they were often careful to establish that she was a 'proper' or 'natural' woman as well as important politically. Her critics were more inclined to question her femininity and to see her importance in historically specific rather than in overarching terms. Women activists, significantly, seemed most likely to identify with her need to be participate in the public and political sphere. They also accepted the fact that she was a woman with minimal comment except insofar as to recognise her importance as a role model for women in the future.

1877-1914: Biographical Accounts Including Those Emerging
from the 'First-Wave' Women's Movement

This section reviews two volumes on Harriet Martineau's life - *Memorials* by Maria Weston Chapman, published in 1877 as a third

volume to the Autobiography and Florence Fenwick Miller's biography, published in 1884 - and a handful of biographical articles. There seemed to be little agreement among the writers in this period about which aspects of Harriet Martineau's life were worthy of note, except that all viewed her children's books in *The Playfellow* series as of outstanding merit. Nevertheless, two features are evident in relation to earlier commentaries. First, the feminist project of making women more visible is clearly in evidence; and secondly, in contrast, less sympathetic biographers identify 'egocentrism' as one of Harriet Martineau's major failings.

'First-wave' feminist attempts to re-discover Harriet Martineau as a 'foremother' of the nineteenth century women's movement surfaced in the work of Miller, ⁽³⁵⁾ and in a volume by Edwin A. Pratt, *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign*, published in 1897. ⁽³⁶⁾ Both saw Harriet Martineau as an innovator: Pratt, because her article on female employment in 1859 led to the establishment by Jessie Boucherett of the Society for Promoting Employment for Women; and Miller, for Harriet Martineau's path-clearing achievements as a female role model.

In the paths where Harriet Martineau trod at first almost alone, many women are now following. Serious studies, political activity, a share in social reforms, and independent, self-supporting career, and freedom of thought and expression are, by the conditions of our age, becoming open to the thousands of women who would never have dared to claim them in the circumstances in which she first did so' .

(Miller F. F., (1884), *Harriet Martineau*, London, W. H. Allen, pp. 221-222)

Miller was the first biographer to make a special point of identifying all Harriet Martineau's feminist activities; from the first pieces on women and divinity and girls' education in her early twenties, through the articles on women for the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Daily News* in her middle years, to her support for campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts and for women's suffrage in old age. However, one is left with the impression that the main purpose of this biography was to defend Harriet Martineau from herself, as revealed in the *Autobiography*, and from her critics. Like Greg some years earlier, Miller felt that the *Autobiography* did not do its author justice. Clearly for Miller, feminist role-models should not reveal any flaws.

No one who knows her considers that she did herself justice in the *Autobiography*. It is hard and censorious; it displays vanity, both in its depreciation of her own work, and in its recital of the petty slights and insults which had been offered to her from time to time; it is aggressive, as though replying to enemies rather than appealing to friends; and no one of either the finer or the softer qualities of her nature is at all adequately indicated. It is, in short, the least worthy of her true self of all the writings of her life.

(*Ibid.*, p. 175)

Miller was quick to leap to her heroine's defence from the 'vile attacks' of the *Quarterly Review*, ⁽³⁷⁾ though she herself perceived the *Illustrations* as being 'plainly and inevitably damaged, as works of art, by the fact that they are written to convey definite lessons'. ⁽³⁸⁾ Nevertheless, in such tales as *French Wine and Politics*, Harriet Martineau's 'constant sympathy with democracy, her hatred of oppression and tyranny, and her aversion to class

government' (39) were clearly stated. Miller dismissed the Quarterly Review's response as being 'obviously full of fallacies, as regards its Political Economy', though 'so very funny that the attacked might almost have forgotten the insult in the amusement'. (40)

Another aim of Miller's was to confirm her subject's womanliness. For example, Miller indulged in a little speculation on Harriet Martineau's sexuality. She suggested that though Harriet's betrothal came to nothing, she had known 'love' and therefore 'womanliness of nature remained fresh and true and sweet to the end of her days because of it'. (41) Moreover, Miller regarded Harriet's association with Henry Atkinson, a younger man, with whom she collaborated on *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* in 1851, as being a confirmation of her 'normal' sexuality. (42) Yet the relationship was still regarded as somewhat suspect.

But I cannot doubt that long before this volume of *Letters* was published, he had become dear to her by virtue of that personal attraction which is not altogether dependent on merit, but which enhances such merits as may be possessed by the object of the attachment, and somewhat confuses the relationship on the intellectual side.

(Ibid., p. 157)

Pratt, on the other hand, had a less personal though equally feminist objective in his analysis of Harriet Martineau's work. In his publication, he attempted to chart changes in women's employment

during the nineteenth century. In doing so, he identified Harriet Martineau as one of the first to challenge the 'old tradition that a woman's place is in the home' and 'to point out in clear and unmistakable terms the fallacy of the said tradition and the absolute necessity of providing further outlets for the employment of women'. (43)

It was, indeed, in an article which she contributed to the *Edinburgh Review* of April, 1859, that the present phase of the question had its origin, for not only was this article a striking one in itself, but... it directly inspired the pioneer effort that was made to put the whole subject on a footing alike practical and logical.

(Pratt E. A., (1897), *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign*, London, George Newnes Ltd., p. 6)

Other articles written during this period, generally as part of collections of biographical sketches of celebrated women, also acknowledged Harriet Martineau's historical importance: 'No woman is more typical of the unrest and feverishness of the nineteenth century than Harriet Martineau...She was really the first of the notable Englishwomen of the nineteenth century'. (44) But they concentrated much more on perceived deficiencies in her character. Once again she was identified by Walford as more 'masculine' than other female writers such as Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth: 'Harriet Martineau had a harder head, a more masculine intellect than either of the above named: her talents lay in a different line from theirs.' (45) And Davenport Adams deemed her not quite a genius but more a writer with considerable and indispensable 'mental gifts' - 'quickness of perception, coolness of judgement, the

logical faculty, and the power of ready and vigorous expression'.

(46)

However, a new failing was identified by commentators in this period; that of 'egocentrism'. The Autobiography, in particular, was interpreted as revealing 'a personage possessed of powerful capacities' who was at the same time 'prejudiced, jealous, exacting, and inordinately egotistical'. According to Walford, 'it is "I, I, I," from morning to night, from year's end to year's end.' (47)

Davenport Adams suggested that it was only because of Harriet Martineau's 'colossal self-confidence' that she could challenge the decisions of statesmen or be in a position to influence the councils of ministers. 'Never was there such a woman with so firm a belief in herself; and seldom, let us in justice add, has so preposterous an egotism been allied with so luminous an intellect.' (48)

Moreover, though this egotism enabled her to influence statesmen, it denied her the label of genius.

An egotism of such monstrous proportions is not the egotism of a genius, but of talent: and Miss Martineau, though a woman of extraordinary talent, was not a woman of genius. She had none of the calm and serenity of genius, of its moderation, its sweet reasonableness. She had neither its views of largest scope, its high aspirations, its fine sensibilities, nor its liberal sympathies'

English

(Davenport Adams W. H., (1884), *Celebrated Women of the Victorian Era*, London, F. V. White & Co., p. 66)

Whilst Miss Martineau had a 'brisk, vivacious, active and fertile mind', she clearly lacked the feminine attributes necessary for 'women of genius'. As to the criticisms of Miss Martineau in the *Quarterly Review* and other papers, she was so 'deficient in humour that she saw hostility where only a little banter was intended'.

(49) She clearly could not accept any challenge to her 'teaching' or 'workmanship'. Harriet Martineau's later conversion to atheism was also a problem for Davenport Adams, and perhaps provides the reason for this extraordinarily hostile attack on her character. Might she have been more acceptable if she had embraced Christian beliefs? 'Ah! if Harriet Martineau had but known the religion of Christ in all its fulness, all its beauty, and all its truth, with what larger expectations and loftier hopes would she have read the mystery of the future!' (50)

Other publications on Harriet Martineau during this period concentrated on a variety of features of her life. Maria Weston Chapman's *Memorials* merely rehearsed the themes of the *Autobiography* and James Martineau's long letter in the *Daily News* (51) provided little additional information on his sister's life. His main aim in writing the letter was to clarify his mother's relationship with his sister which he felt had been misrepresented in Miller's biography. James Payn (52) emphasised the warmth and human side of Harriet Martineau's character, and Elbert Hubbard, (53) her role as an agitator and campaigning writer. Emil Reich, (54) writing in 1908, concentrated on her atheism, her tendency to 'priggish and austere censure' and devoted one fifth of his appraisal of her to

appearance: 'she was above middle height with a slender figure. She was certainly not beautiful, for besides the noticeable projection of the under lip, her cheeks sloped in too much towards her chin. The nose was straight, the eyes clear grey....' and so on. (55)

Finally, the Dictionary of National Biography, founded in 1882, offered a five page review of Harriet Martineau's life. It presented a relatively uncontroversial portrait of her as a miscellaneous writer and influential political figure. It did not, however, mention, her commitment to the 'Woman Question'. As 'an interpreter of a rather rigid and prosaic school of thought, and a compiler of clear compendiums of knowledge, she certainly deserves a high place, and her independence and solidity of character give value to her more personal utterances.' (56)

It seems, then, that two distinct perspectives on Harriet Martineau emerged during this period. The first was clearly feminist, recognising her as an early pioneer in the cause of women and as a role model for future generations. The other accepted that she was an important woman in the nineteenth century, but focused on perceived inadequacies of character and appearance.

1914-1939: Biographical Accounts During the Inter-war Period

The biographical output on Harriet Martineau during this period was similar in volume to the last. Two full biographies were produced, the first by Theodora Bosanquet in 1927, (57) and the second by

Nicola Elizabeth Rivenburg in 1932. ⁽⁵⁸⁾ In addition a number of biographical articles were written, again usually as one of a set of articles on famous Victorian celebrities. The feminist project was still evident in the writing of Janet Courtney who wrote two volumes (1920, 1933) about early feminist pioneers. ⁽⁵⁹⁾ However, the two main biographies were concerned more to explore the character and beliefs of a noted Victorian intellectual who happened to be a woman. Bosanquet focused on exploring the psychological aspects of Harriet's character, and Rivenburg, on tracing the development of her ideas. Several of the articles concentrated on Harriet's perspectives on American culture and the rest viewed her as of general historical interest. Significantly, all except two of the shorter articles were written by women.

For Courtney, who was clearly influenced by the suffrage movement and by the increased number of women entering the workforce during the Great War, Harriet Martineau's value in history was less to do with her contribution to nineteenth century philosophy than with 'her assertion of a woman's right to think'. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ Accordingly, it was Harriet Martineau's success in entering a literary field which had up to then excluded women, that marked her off as an important feminist pioneer. Additionally, her active part in popularising progressive thought earned her the title 'freethinker of the nineteenth century'. ⁽⁶¹⁾ In her later volume, Courtney dismissed existing histories of the women's movement which were based on parliamentary and political movements in favour of writing 'pragmatic' history; 'to pick up remarkable women in a remarkable

decade' - that of the 1830s. Again, she focused on Harriet Martineau as a role-model.

And when I found Harriet Martineau, the ablest of them all, announcing that all the best advocates of women's rights would be the successful professional women, the "substantially successful authoresses", I recognized that she had put into a nutshell the whole truth about the women's movement.

(Courtney J., (1933), *The Adventurous Thirties; a Chapter in the Women's Movement*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 1)

Interestingly, nearly half century after Miller's biography, Courtney had few qualms about the merits of the *Autobiography*. Although its author was 'priggish and self-conscious about social success', the work was 'of most engaging candour'. (62) Presumably all who could be offended by it were long since dead.

Bosanquet was not nearly so interested in her subject's feminism: indeed, she made scant reference to it in her biographical study. Instead, in what could be described as a popularly written and somewhat essentialist account of Harriet Martineau's life, she introduced a psychological dimension. 'I have tried to...relate Miss Martineau's life and opinions...to the personal influences which so clearly and powerfully affected her.' (63) Thus, Bosanquet speculated about Harriet Martineau's unconscious impulses, particularly where they concerned 'love'. Accordingly, Harriet fell in love first with Lant Carpenter, the Bristol Unitarian theologian in her teens when she was sent to study with him. She returned home 'fervently religious'. James, her younger brother was the next

object of her affections: however, he became attached to his future wife at the age of seventeen and left home shortly afterwards. Then Harriet turned her attentions to a student friend of her brother, John Worthington, but he died before they were married.

While, Bosanquet wrote, one could hardly have painted Harriet as a permanent 'heart widow', 'her enthusiastic, idealising adorations of the friends of her later life suggest, indeed, the experiences of perpetual emotional adolescence'. ⁽⁶⁴⁾ Moreover, in *Deerbrook*, she was able to develop the theme of jealousy between sisters out of her own experience, and to avoid the responsibility of caring for her aging mother, 'the only respectable resource was to fall ill'. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ Finally, later in her life 'she easily transferred the adoration for an invisible god to the more satisfying image of a perfect gentleman provided by her young friend', Henry Atkinson, who was by all accounts (including that of the American feminist writer, Margaret Fuller) exceedingly handsome. ⁽⁶⁶⁾

There are several indications in this volume that Theodora Bosanquet was influenced by some of the less savoury themes of the time. She dwelt on physical appearance, perhaps with eugenics questions in mind. She lingered, for example, on the 'inflexible purpose' shining in Harriet's grey eyes and the stiffening of 'her protruding underlip', as Harriet sought to persuade William J. Fox, 'a short, thickset man with a dark intelligent face', to publish her series. ⁽⁶⁷⁾ Moreover Bosanquet felt that Harriet's appearance was always against her. For example, she was unable to use any feminine charms

with publishers to get the Illustrations published. 'Since she had no gift for charming men into indulgence, her sex was nothing but a hindrance, inspiring real men of business with an instinctive distrust of the thin, pale, deaf young woman who wanted them to publish her stories for her.' (68)

Finally there is more than a tinge of antisemitism in her description of the political economist, David Ricardo, an important influence on the Illustrations. He was, according to Bosanquet:

an amiable Jew possessed of a genius for constructing towering systems of flawless deductions based on insecure premises, who had turned the speculative ability of his race to such good account on the Stock Exchange that he was able to retire, affluent and admired, when he was about forty years old'

(Bosanquet T., (1927), Harriet Martineau: an Essay in Comprehension. London, Etchells & Macdonald, pp. 41-2).

In an altogether superior work, Rivenburg displayed an interest in exploring Harriet Martineau's intellectual qualities. Describing her as 'one of the first women writers to seek better conditions for the lower classes', (69) Rivenburg, nevertheless, cast a critical, if fair, eye over Harriet Martineau's work. Accordingly, Harriet Martineau could not be described as an original thinker, though she was a powerful influence. If her commitment to *laissez faire* was total and her fundamental conclusion was that individuals were the best judges of their own interests, this also led to advocacy of democracy and representative government. (70)

Rivenburg identified the contradiction between Harriet Martineau's commitment to *laissez-faire*-ism and her continued struggle against the social conditions of the day. In Rivenburg's view, Harriet Martineau should, logically, have sided with the Southern States in the Civil War as they wished for political freedom and *laissez faire* trade. However her distrust of aristocracy and her hatred of slavery caused her to side with the North. ⁽⁷¹⁾ Harriet Martineau's position on women was also deemed contradictory, a mix of both radical and conservative ideas. Though she often emphasised women's place as in the home, she held advanced views on female employment and education. Rivenburg also pointed out, as I do in chapter 2, that Harriet Martineau eventually supported state intervention to remove abuses in the mines when she realised that women and children were being endangered. ⁽⁷²⁾

The other biographical pieces written in this period were less serious works. Joseph Adelman ⁽⁷³⁾ and Una Pope Hennessy ⁽⁷⁴⁾ concentrated on Harriet Martineau's visit to, and criticism of, the United States. Adelman emphasised her celebrity status during the visit, whilst Pope Hennessy concentrated on her skills as a traveller - 'without exaggeration, Harriet Martineau might be set down as the perfect traveller' ⁽⁷⁵⁾. Pope Hennessy also noted Harriet Martineau's conversion to the Abolitionist cause during the trip, and her criticisms of the new democracy in *Society in America*, and in the better received *A Retrospect of Western Travel*. ⁽⁷⁶⁾

Edward Boyle, (77) unlike many of Harriet Martineau's other male biographers, seems unusually even-handed in his evaluation of her work even though he did accuse her 'of a certain hardness and dogmatic narrowness of view'. (78) Quoting a plaque celebrating her achievements in the Octagon Chapel in Norwich where she is described as 'authoress and pioneer in opening many new spheres of work for women', he suggested that Harriet Martineau probably under-rated herself. 'Harriet Martineau was at the bottom a woman devoid of self-importance; but she regarded it as her duty to write what in her view it was to the good of her fellow countrymen that they should hear.' (79) Moreover, he asked, if Harriet Martineau had lived two decades later, if she had not been deaf or suffered ill-health, if she had not been forced to be self-sufficient, what might she have achieved? (80)

In summary, whilst the feminist reappraisal of Harriet Martineau's work was still in evidence (though perhaps waning), the main thrust during this period, was to consider her importance as a rather unusual and eccentric Victorian personage. For American writers, on the other hand, her visit to America and subsequent criticism of American political and cultural practices, were of paramount importance. Most vividly of all, one of the principal ways of commenting on Harriet Martineau's life and work during this period, particularly in the writing of Bosanquet and Reich, is with an increased interest in explanations for perceived psychological traits and manifest behaviour, and in the importance of appearance.

1940-1970: Commentaries Pre-dating the Modern Women's Movement

The volume of biographical writing on Harriet Martineau was modest during this period, though increased availability of primary sources in the form of unpublished letters and Daily News leaders, produced two better informed offerings. Vera Wheatley's work, published in 1957, attempted to restore the reputation of a Victorian figure 'so frequently misrepresented and misunderstood' (81): and R. K. Webb, whose biography of Harriet Martineau appeared in 1960, wanted to use Harriet Martineau as a case-study to illuminate the early Victorian period. (82) Otherwise, interest in Harriet Martineau was subdued and the biographical emphasis variable. John Cranstoun Nevill (83) brought out a slim volume on Harriet Martineau's life which drew heavily on the Autobiography, and the feminist project was all but dead except in short biographical extracts by Janet Dunbar (84) and Josephine Kamm. (85) Other biographers focused on Harriet Martineau's contributions as a writer, autobiographer and local Norwich resident. (86)

Wheatley became interested in writing about Harriet Martineau's life because, she explained, she found her subject so often in books relating to the nineteenth century. Harriet Martineau, according to Wheatley, was sometimes described 'in a moderately eulogistical manner, sometimes in a satirical fashion, more often in a denigratory way; but she is so often *there*.' (87) As hitherto unpublished correspondence had then become available, Wheatley embarked upon a new, more personal biography. While she used a

fairly standard approach to biographical writing, charting, often in minute detail, each period in her subject's life, she focused in particular on changes in her subject's morale and personal feelings. For example, emphasis was placed on Harriet's unhappiness as a child - as unloved, reserved, serious and plain; on her jealousy of her older sister Rachel and on her affection for her younger siblings, especially her brother, James; in her twenties, on her growing deafness and seeming inability to have any fun; on her confused response to her fiance's death; on her weakness and 'sallowness' after the publication of the first of her Illustrations; on her 'lionisation' and toleration of vilification in the press; on her collapse in health and cure by mesmerism; on her continued ill health later in life and so on.

Whilst Wheatley was circumspect in her treatment of her subject's relationship with Henry Atkinson, whom she described as a 'bore of the first quality', she questioned his motives and Harriet's judgement. (88) Further, Harriet's 'masculine' brain was compared to Atkinson's 'womanish' qualities. Sex-stereotypes abound in Wheatley's appraisal of the relationship: 'it was evident that he sometimes found her queries difficult, for her's was the more analytical, masculine brain and his the weaker, more womanish and confused.' (89)

Throughout the volume, Wheatley emphasised Harriet Martineau's 'deep affectionate' qualities and strong family feelings.

She was sometimes didactic, she did expect her views to be received with some respect, she did on occasion talk too much; but what has been long forgotten is that she possessed a large, loving heart, that she was incomparably loyal in her affections and friendships, and that she was sympathetic beyond the capacity of many purely intellectual women.

(Wheatley V., (1957), *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau*, London, Secker & Warburg, p. 394)

Other characteristics Wheatley thought worthy of attention included Harriet Martineau's feminism and her skills as a writer and journalist. On the first, while her subject had a 'feeling for her own sex', she preferred the company of men and, according to Wheatley, was not 'the fervent suffragette that she has been sometimes ticketed'. (90) Wheatley was much more interested in her subject as a writer:

The style is indeed unmistakable. It is interesting to turn the yellowed sheets of the old files and pick out leader after leader on every imaginable subject, all bearing the hall-mark of that richly informed, perspicacious mind.

She had only one ambition, as far as the actual writing went, and that was to convey to her readers, not in the shortest possible manner for, like many of her contemporaries she was frequently prolix, but in the simplest, clearest words, what she wished them to understand.

(Ibid., pp. 324 & 395)

Wheatley's admiration of Harriet Martineau's writing style was shared by Webb, but apart from that the two biographies had little in common. Webb's biography was principally written to answer two questions: what nineteenth century forces were formed and reflected in the life of Harriet Martineau, and what could a study of her consistent attitudes reveal about early Victorian life? ⁽⁹¹⁾ He viewed his subject as displaying typical Victorian characteristics. For example, Harriet Martineau took to her bed, as had Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, believing she had a mortal illness. She led an incredibly active life as a writer, traveller, and philanthropist; and she took up fashionable interests. Thus, political economy was on everyone's lips in the 1830s, there was great interest in mesmerism in the 1840s, she travelled to the Near East 'when it was the thing to do', and her predictions about the need to abolish slavery were 'proved right' in the 1850s. Accordingly, 'she reflected and magnified some powerfully symptomatic contemporary concerns. This is why she was so much talked about and why she is so useful to historians.' ⁽⁹²⁾

Webb, like others, found his subject's relationship with Henry Atkinson of enormous interest. 'Atkinson belonged to a type which will always be with us, at least as long as sufficient fortunes can be inherited.' ⁽⁹³⁾ According to Webb, Atkinson was a gold-digger, a dilettante, and probably a homosexual. 'If I am right in this conjecture, the friendship with a mature and relatively sexless woman, who could be no kind of threat, is intelligible, if it is not to be dismissed...as part and parcel of his dilettantism.' ⁽⁹⁴⁾

Further, Webb suggested, Harriet Martineau could only be friendly with 'second-rate' people like Atkinson because she herself was only 'second-rate'. The friends with whom she had quarrelled, such as Carlyle and Dickens, numbered among them a high proportion of first class intellects: yet she retained, as life-long influences, lesser mortals such as Abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Maria Weston Chapman. Thus, 'Harriet Martineau was the perfect example of the limited intellect secure enough in its convictions to challenge its betters. The phenomenon has always existed and will always exist, the bane of genius - and perhaps its salvation.' (95)

As far as the 'Woman Question' was concerned, however, Webb thought Harriet Martineau among the most important advocates of women's advancement. It remained among the most important causes of her life and her views on it never really changed. 'When the question of women's rights assumed its proper place in the catalogue of reforms, she was reasonable...and remarkably consistent.' (96)

However, he also noted that many of her friends found her feminist views utterly incomprehensible, put off by her shrillness of tone and deliberately uncompromising stand. By middle-age, however, Harriet Martineau began to realise that she was no longer a lone voice on the 'Woman Question'.

She was with them ['Women Missionaries'] insofar as they wanted to help people to find out what they could do and do it; but she detested "all setting up of idols, Proclamation of Rights, & all unnecessary divisions of men's work and women's work."

She repudiated all abstractions of rights, she told Reeve, all *a priori* arrangements for giving women a position, and she thought it would be disastrous if the pedants got hold of the movement.

(Webb R.K., (1960), *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*, London, Heinemann, p. 179)

She was also, according to Webb, 'an incurable teacher', always having to write with a clear purpose in mind. 'She never once doubted that education and proper circumstances...would produce a whole nation of clear sighted, selfless, active, benevolent and dedicated men and women.' (97) Webb took a sceptical view of what he saw as Harriet Martineau's 'desperate insistence on any kind of education'. He suggested that she was principally inspired by 'police' motives.

Education, she thought, cut two ways, up and down; it would teach the lower orders their best interest, to co-operate, if not baldly to obey, and...it had to teach the ruling classes to be worthy of that cooperation...

The period was so disturbed, the spectacle of the lower classes so appalling, that something had to be done if society was to survive, if its main energies were not to be diverted from the main struggle of liberty in the world to police actions at home.'

(Ibid., pp. 117 & 221)

It is to Harriet Martineau's profession as a writer and journalist that Webb reserved his main tribute. Not only did she thoroughly possess the art of writing but her manuscripts were extraordinarily neat with almost no corrections or changes. Moreover:

the quality of her prose is almost unvarying and thoroughly in accord with the canons of the fine journalistic style of the middle of the century. It is a great exasperating tribute that, when positive identifications are lacking, it is next to impossible to single out her contributions to the paper on stylistic grounds.

(Ibid., p. 42)

Other writers on Harriet Martineau during this period were far less thorough than either Wheatley or Webb. Nevill, (98) for example, produced a short, standard biography which reported, without complication, his subject's wide range of achievements. As has already been mentioned, Nevill drew heavily on the *Autobiography*, but otherwise provided little added insight into Harriet Martineau's life. He refrained from criticising her relationship with Henry Atkinson even though Nevill saw her as the more 'masculine' half of the partnership. In his comments on *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, written jointly by Harriet Martineau and Henry Atkinson in 1851, Nevill observed:

Actually the theological part of the book is much more rational than the pseudo-scientific, possibly because Harriet's rather masculine wrist gave a jerk to the reins every now and then, curbing her partner's tendency to kick up his heels and gallop from one unsupported declaration to another.

(Nevill J. Cranstoun, (1943), *Harriet Martineau*, London, Frederick Muller Ltd., p. 98)

Nevill's evaluation of his Harriet Martineau was of a forgotten eccentric who could be 'narrow and absurdly prejudiced in her attitude towards life', yet whose 'sober

conscientiousness...illuminated...everything she touched'. Moreover, she was an important role model for the women of the 1940s:

And though she herself be forgotten, and her books disregarded and unread, she was among the first of those nineteenth-century pioneers - Elizabeth Fry, Charlotte Bronte, Florence Nightingale, George Eliot - to mention only a few at random - who, by sheer force of character, broke through the male police cordon which excluded their sex from any active participation in public affairs.

(Ibid., p. 107)

Frances E. Mineka, ⁽⁹⁹⁾, in contrast, concentrated on Harriet Martineau's writing for the small Unitarian journal the *Monthly Repository*. Mineka was quick to point out that the Harriet he was writing about was the early version; the unknown provincial young lady rather than the 'strange phenomenon' she was later to become. Her early article on 'Female Education' written in 1823, according to Mineka, was perhaps the best and most complete treatment of the subject of the time. However, his main concern was with Harriet Martineau's eighty-nine 'articles, reviews, tales, poems and sketches' in 1830 and 1831 for the *Repository*, many of which were unsigned, and which covered a wide range of topics including theology, morals, mental philosophy and biography. ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Mineka speculated that perhaps her fiancé's untimely death prompted concern with 'the problem of the recluse, the solitary, [which] seems to have been much on Harriet's mind in these years'. ⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Wayne Shumaker (102) paid more attention to Harriet Martineau's psychological state. For Shumaker, many of the autobiographies appearing between 1870 and 1900, including those of John Stuart Mill, Anthony Trollope, John Ruskin and Harriet Martineau were, for the most part, 'studies in psychic development'. In his view, Victorians were acutely aware of the 'transformation of consciousness' which embraced both romanticism and a complexity of unknown forces. In quoting Harriet's own admission of being plunged into the spirit of her time, he suggested that her autobiographical account was consistently developmental. However 'her acquisition of a literary reputation gives her a new self-confidence and even a vindictiveness of character; from that point on the work is partly apology and partly *res gestae*.' (103)

In contrast Renshaw, in a slight piece for the North Norfolk News in 1970 entitled 'The Lady with the Ear Trumpet', focused on Harriet Martineau's connections with Norwich and on her hearing impairment. For Renshaw, Harriet Martineau was a celebrity of a bygone age. 'Would she have cared', Renshaw asked, 'that her writings are now no longer on the open shelves of our libraries'. The answer was a firm negative; she was only useful in her day and that was enough. (104)

Finally, Dunbar and Kamm provided the feminist link with the new era. Dunbar, in her book *The Early Victorian Woman*, characterised Harriet Martineau as a woman writer rather than a reformer or educator. She was charged with starting a new trend - 'the novel with a purpose began with Harriet Martineau' (105) - and with having

a fine intellect, humanitarian outlook and an incisive pen. By far the most enthusiastic about Harriet Martineau during this period, however, was Josephine Kamm in her volume *Rapiers and Battleaxes; The Women's Movement and its Aftermath*, published in 1966. Here, Harriet Martineau was proclaimed as a 'champion of women's education', a pioneer in the field of women's employment, one of the first, as a 'respectable spinster', to mount a challenge to the Contagious Diseases Acts, and as an early supporter of women's suffrage. (106)

In the period immediately before the beginning of the modern women's movement, then, it is evident that Harriet Martineau's contribution to feminism and the women's advancement were very low priorities for most of her commentators. They seemed much more interested in exploring what motivated this nineteenth century curiosity, and, being unaware that they were making generalisations about her subjectivity and individuality in terms which were both prejudiced and misogynist, came to rather individualistic and personality-orientated conclusions. In particular, R. K. Webb, a highly regarded historian of the nineteenth century took, what seems to me, a high-handedly sexist (and homophobic) perspective. The only aspects of Harriet Martineau he seemed to value were the neatness of her manuscripts and her prose style. It could be argued that this exceedingly stereotyped view of Harriet Martineau's work is indicative of the perspective on women held by male historians and other academics working in the 1950s and 1960s. Only in the short pieces by Dunbar and Kamm, can we perceive an indication of the

expansion of interest in Harriet Martineau's work which was to come with the emergence of the modern women's movement.

1970 Onwards: Second-Wave Feminist Perspectives

In the last twenty or so years, more interest has been expressed in Harriet Martineau's work than ever before. Five volumes have been devoted wholly or for the most part to her work; three major new biographies, by Valerie Kossew Pichanick, (107) Gillian Thomas (108) and Valerie Sanders, (109) a collection of her writings on women edited by Gayle Graham Yates (110) and an exploration of intellectual women in Victorian times by Deidre David. (111) Additionally Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and novel *Deerbrook* were reissued by Virago in 1983 and fifteen serious articles have focused on particular aspects of her work. In addition, there have been numerous shorter biographical pieces, most written at the time of the re-publication of the Autobiography. In my view, this new Harriet Martineau 'industry', to borrow Marwick's term, (112) is part of the renewed interest in women's studies generally as a consequence of the modern women's movement.

In attempting to summarise this large volume of biographical writing, the commentaries have been grouped according to which aspects of Harriet Martineau's life and work were found to be most noteworthy. These include her roles as a nineteenth century public figure, writer, autobiographer, sociologist, political economist and early feminist.

For Pichanick, like Webb, Harriet Martineau's interest lay in the fact that she reflected the interests and ideas of her time. However, there the similarity ends, for Pichanick showed rather more recognition of Harriet Martineau's achievements, and of her importance to historians today. Pichanick drew attention to the 'flaws' in her subject's character, for example, in Harriet Martineau's 'too facile' a sympathy for the ideas of others, her haste to rush unconsidered conclusions into print, and her naive optimism in the laws of science and society. Yet she also noted more positive features to her subject's output. For example, Pichanick regarded Harriet Martineau's 'contemporaneity' for the modern historian as her most interesting and enduring feature. 'Martineau was an astute observer of her own era. She seized upon the vital issues of the day, and with that dispatch and fluency which made her such a considerable journalist, she informed her public.' (113)

The volume by Thomas, on the other hand, whilst providing a standard narrative biographical account, focused in particular on Harriet Martineau's role as a public educator. Thomas associated the popularity of the Illustrations and other works of Harriet Martineau with the development, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, of a mass reading public. 'New industrial processes, such as the use of a steam driven printing press, made it more possible for books and other publications to be printed more cheaply than ever before.' (114) Further, the popular readership displayed an appetite for political discussion 'fed by a torrent of political tracts,

pamphlets and periodical journalism'. ⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Harriet Martineau was, thus, both influenced by, and was herself to benefit from, this specific literary form.

Thomas, like this thesis, also attempted to identify the ambivalences and contradictions in people's evaluations of Harriet Martineau life and work. She suggested that whilst Harriet Martineau had hitherto been found interesting only as a minor contemporary of the literary 'greats', recently she had emerged in her own right, as a nineteenth-century woman making her living by writing, and as an early feminist. ⁽¹¹⁶⁾

Thomas located Harriet Martineau's importance in the *purpose* of her writing. Others concentrated more on her *role* as a nineteenth-century woman writer. Elaine Showalter, ⁽¹¹⁷⁾ for example, included Harriet Martineau in the first generation of nineteenth-century 'feminine' novelists, born between 1800 and 1820, who are identified with the 'Golden Age' of writing (also mentioned in the literature section in chapter 2). Others included in this cohort are the Brontes, Elizabeth Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot. Showalter suggested that members of this first group of writers, along with other female contemporaries such as Florence Nightingale, Mary Carpenter and Angela Burdett were 'female role innovators' - they were breaking new ground and creating new possibilities. ⁽¹¹⁸⁾

Showalter claimed that many of the images of the 'feminine' novel were related to money, mobility and power. Although 'feminine' novelists chastised assertive heroines, they dealt with personal ambition by projecting the ideology of success on to male characters, whose initiative, thrift, industry and perseverance came straight from the women authors' experience. The male hero was often a more effective outlet for the 'deviant' aspects of the author's personality than were her heroines, and thus male role-playing extended beyond the pseudonym, which most of them (including Harriet Martineau) used at one time or another, to imaginative content. ⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Pichanick made a similar point. 'It is rather surprising that Martineau failed to create a new image of woman in literature...It was the men and boys in her stories who acted, and the women and girls who suffered.' ⁽¹²⁰⁾

Sanders also concentrated on Harriet Martineau's contribution as a writer, but this time of fiction. According to Sanders, not only did Harriet Martineau's contemporaries often read her fictionalised didactic tracts for the story-lines alone, but her 'experiments in fiction' initiated continuing themes in later Victorian literature. Hence, Sanders was engaged in exploring the pattern of affinities linking Harriet Martineau with other major and minor novelists. For example, the Illustrations stood between 'the professional educators Knight and Brougham and the novelists of the 1840s, offering a picture of the ideal workman who improves himself by their recommended methods' ⁽¹²¹⁾; and Deerbrook stood uneasily between Jane Austen's Persuasion and Charlotte Bronte's Villette -

yet fell short of both. Nevertheless, the choice of Hope, the provincial doctor, reformer and philosopher, as the lower middle-class hero of *Deerbrook*, started a tradition in Victorian women's writing which was to be taken up by others including George Eliot in *Middlemarch*. ⁽¹²²⁾ Whatever her literary innovations, according to Sanders, Harriet Martineau experienced a conflict between reason and imagination in her writing which she never ultimately resolved.

Her adherence to fixed laws, in writing as in everything else, offered an easy answer that she was too frequently tempted to accept. It is only when she swerves from the rules, often unintentionally, when she lets a Political Economy character develop, or a decorous woman protest, that her tales and novels start to be interesting, and their influence potentially far-reaching.

(Sanders V., (1986), *Reason Over Passion; Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel*, Brighton, Harvester Press, p.195)

Figes ⁽¹²³⁾ in contrast, suggested that passion was indeed visible in Harriet Martineau's writing: and that *Deerbrook* was a vehicle for its author to express feelings and passion that, otherwise, were forced to remain hidden. Figes claimed that unrequited love was probably the most accurate interpretation for the inclusion of the novel's more 'purple' parts;

Martineau is writing about sexual passion, which for a woman was associated with shame and secrecy, a secret revolutionary change between girlhood and womanhood for which her upbringing in no way prepared her. Worse: there was a conspiracy of

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silence between women, between mothers and daughters, because of social and internalised restraints, so that each woman, when the crisis point comes, suffers alone, believing herself in some way unique.

(Figs E., (1982), *Sex and Subterfuge; Women Novelists to 1850*, London, Macmillan, p. 116).

Earlier in the nineteenth century, according to Figs, it had been impossible for women writers to express themselves freely through fiction, since they were not free. To a great extent social restraints had to be internalised, even for women who were, themselves, beginning to challenge the restrictions on women. Moreover, the commercial publishing world itself would not tolerate opinions too far distanced from the general consensus. So, one way to avoid the 'disturbing demands of the inner voice' had been to channel literary invention into 'objective' social comment, as in the case of the *Illustrations*. (124)

Colby, (125) adopting yet another perspective on Harriet Martineau as a writer of fiction, traced in her subject's work, the emergence of a new and powerfully shaping influence in nineteenth-century English fiction - that of the domestic novel.

The qualities that define the domestic novel are all here [in *Deerbrook*]. It is bourgeois and anti-romantic. It glorifies the solid values of home and family. It recognises that the goal of all humans is happiness and self-fulfillment, but it constantly reminds us of the Christian-evangelical imperatives of duty, submission of the individual will, self-sacrifice, and endurance.

(Colby V., (1974), *Yesterday's Women*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 212)

Other commentators focused, not on Harriet Martineau's fictional output but on her contribution to autobiography. Myers (126) heralded the author of the *Autobiography* as a champion of biographical truth and candour, determined, in as scientific and objective a way as possible, to reveal the typicality of her experience in an age of cultural transition. Further, Myers used the *Autobiography* as the chief document in a case-study of 'domestic history', linking Harriet Martineau's private experience to her public achievements. (127) Harriet's poor relationship with her mother and ultimate retreat into invalidism to avoid being her mother's sole carer were significant influences on her public life.

Martineau never really succeeded in coming to terms with her mother, but she did succeed in coming to terms with herself. In a sense, she ultimately made herself into the mother she had always wanted to have - sympathetic, confident, just and serene. Her complex experience richly illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of Victorian mother-and-daughter relationships.

(Myers M., (1980), 'Unmothered daughter and radical reformer: Harriet Martineau's career' in C. N. Davidson (ed.) *The Lost Tradition of Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1980, p.79)

Sanders also perceived the *Autobiography* as as a work of candour and integrity; indeed, as exposing Harriet Martineau's innermost feelings. In a study comparing the autobiographies of four contemporary women (the others were Fanny Kemble, the actress, and Margaret Oliphant and Elizabeth Sewell, both writers) Sanders claimed that Harriet Martineau's work comes closest to being a confession of her thoughts. This, therefore, makes the

Autobiography more accessible to modern audiences than the works of the other three women. (128)

Another study of Harriet Martineau's relationship with her mother by Postlethwaite, (129) investigated the transformation of Harriet Martineau from the competent successful woman in the early 1830s to the dependent invalid a decade or so later. Postlethwaite maintained that Harriet Martineau exhibited the classic nineteenth century symptoms of hysteria, a gendered medical condition, generally deemed as emanating from the need of women to escape social pressures. (130) Thus, like Myers above and Bosanquet writing in the 1920s, Postlethwaite suggested that Harriet Martineau's poor health concealed advantages: 'illness enabled her to escape her mother's control; yet by incarcerating herself at Tynmouth she also, in a sense, became her mother.' (131)

Accordingly, Harriet Martineau's illness was, simultaneously, a rebellion against her mother and a reassertion of her femininity. Thus, out of the maternal deprivation of her childhood, she 'built a monument to the generative power of women in moulding human behaviour'; and in her home at Ambleside she was able to sustain a balance between her 'masculine intellectuality' and her 'feminine emotional needs'. (132)

As already mentioned, commentators also highlighted Harriet Martineau's contributions as a sociologist and political economist. Rossi (133) claimed that Harriet Martineau was the first woman sociologist, and that the accounts of her visit to the United States

were outstanding. For example, the analytical approach adopted by Harriet Martineau in order to describe and explain points of difference and similarity between the young American nation and her own more caste-ridden European country, had much in common with the work of modern social scientists and anticipated more recent comparative analyses of social structure. ⁽¹³⁴⁾ Moreover, *How to Observe* was possibly the first methodology handbook of social research ever written.

It is easy to assume from a reading of this manuscript that the methodology she prescribed was Martineau's own preparation for field observation in America and, by extension, that she planned in advance to write a book on America. In her autobiography, however, she explicitly denies such intentions.

(Rossi A. S., (1974), 'The first woman sociologist: Harriet Martineau 1802-76, in Rossi A. S., (ed.), *The Feminist Papers: from Adams to de Beauvoir*, New York, Bantam, p. 120)

Riedesel ⁽¹³⁵⁾ was more interested in Harriet Martineau's translation of Auguste Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. He argued that her loose and liberal interpretation created a superior version to more scholarly and literal translations and it certainly endured as a standard work for decades to come. Further, she enabled Comte's original massive work, and its philosophy, Positivism, to become the cornerstone of sociology in the English speaking world, as well as in the French.

Two distinct perspectives, thus, emerged in the evaluation of Harriet Martineau's contribution to sociology. The first recognised her importance to the development of feminist sociological theory

and the second took a more general sociological view. Terry, (136) for example, claimed that Harriet Martineau, along with Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), laid the groundwork for the development of feminist theory from a sociological perspective. They both invaded the predominantly masculine sphere of public life, combining theory and practice in the quest for improving the conditions 'not only of womankind but of humankind as well'. (137) In contrast, in the most scholarly review of Harriet Martineau's sociological contributions yet produced, Riedesel tried to show that Harriet Martineau's work exhibited features that are generally deemed as sociological. Even if she exhibited certain weaknesses, he argued, she certainly deserved recognition:

With the advantage of hindsight, we can discern countless weaknesses in the content of her observations....With all due efforts to avoid the sins of presentism, we have tried to show that our subject envisioned the social world in a manner resembling that of the recognized precursors of modern sociology. She left no corpus of theory, but if that is the standard of being a sociologist, most of the profession today would be excluded as well...And insofar as Harriet Martineau honoured them [addressing the concepts of naturalism, empiricism and objectivity from a sociological viewpoint], it is appropriate to acknowledge her as a founding mother.

(Riedesel P., (1981), 'Who was Harriet Martineau?', *Journal of the History of Sociology*, 3, 2, p. 77)

It is hardly surprising, given the enormous success of the *Illustrations*, that there has also been some consideration of Harriet Martineau's role as a 'foremother' of political economy; particularly as a promotor and populariser. Dentith (138) claimed that Harriet Martineau's 'ideological texts' provided a wider

audience for the 'abstraction of classical Political Economy' already in existence. Further she used a distinctive literary form that was not literature; more 'a series of gestures towards character and narrative sites'. Her storylines were also distinctive in that the 'narratives, though discursively comparable to those of a novel, are untypical of the novel because they spring so exclusively from Political Economy'. (139)

Others took a more celebratory approach. O'Donnell (140) viewed the *Illustrations* as a 'path-breaking' effort in the discipline of economics education, and Thomson (141) identified Harriet Martineau's importance in her recognition of the widespread demand, in the nineteenth century, for economics education. Whilst Thomson expressed disappointment in Harriet Martineau's 'synthetic fictionalised treatment' of political economy, she nevertheless believed that the *Illustrations*, in their day, had been an extremely successful experiment in adult education. Not only were the stories widely read, but political economy as a topic of discussion became enormously popular. However, Thomson emphasised that Harriet Martineau was only a populariser: at no time did she claim to be anything other than that. (142)

Most attention of commentators during this period, however, was paid to Harriet Martineau's feminist contributions; as a fore-runner to the first-wave women's movement, and to modern feminism. Some, such as Walters (143) and Weiner (144) were concerned mainly with re-discovering forgotten women for the historical record. 'Further

reclamation, further study, discussion and debate on her work and that of other women like her - of a type afforded to her contemporary, John Stuart Mill - is part of our task of reclaiming history.' (145) Others, such as Yates, wanted to make more of her writing, particularly on women, available to modern readers. 'At first expecting merely to do a study of what Martineau wrote on women, I now feel compelled by what I found in her work to present her as an important antecedent to contemporary feminism through the publication of a collection of her own writings about women.' (146)

Yates believed that Harriet Martineau's analyses of some issues, such as the Contagious Diseases Acts and marriage and divorce reform, were remarkably advanced and modern. On the other hand, her concern that the natural destination for most women would be the home, and her suspicion of women's rights legislation denoted an element of conservatism in her approach. Yates recognised the contradictions in Harriet Martineau's position on women, yet appreciated her contribution to feminist ideas. She was:

at times the advance messenger of a new movement, at times a reflector of Victorian eccentric views and narrow morality...[yet] a true progenitor of the intellectual mode that reigns in Anglo-American liberalism today and provides the dominant informing paradigm of mainstream Western feminism.

(Yates G. G., (1985), *Harriet Martineau on Women*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, p. 3 & 5)

Yet, because of her feminism and her public visibility, Harriet Martineau could not be seen as exemplifying typical nineteenth century womanhood. She has nevertheless, according to Yates, an important position as a role model for history: 'a woman of achievement, independence and autonomy, whose hard-won gains resulted from her own effort.' (147)

In a somewhat harsher appraisal, Walters claimed that Harriet Martineau belonged to a bourgeois feminist tradition in which her individual position as a role model was deemed more important than the collective efforts of any movement. Further, she adopted a 'masculine' and impersonal tone in her writing, asserting consistently that the discussion of women's wrongs had no place in the struggle for women's rights. 'High minded, rigorously principled, didactic, she exactly fits popular notions of the typical Victorian'; yet she also had remarkable insight, gained in part from her feminism, and was a superb populariser. (148)

A rather more unusual feminist perspective on Harriet Martineau's work was adopted by David in her book on three nineteenth-century female intellectuals; Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. (149) Taking as her starting point Showalter's study of 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female' stages in nineteenth-century British women's writing, David decided to develop a more dialectical position. She argued that even though the three women defied accepted contemporary definitions of appropriately womanly behaviour, they, nonetheless, remained within mainstream Victorian

culture and society. Further, they simultaneously advocated the male-dominated ideas of their class, and pursued feminist aims: 'I see Martineau, Barrett Browning and Eliot as actively producing many male-dominated Victorian ideas about women, while at the same time being actively engaged by Showalter's concern - "what women have felt and experienced".' (150) Thus exploration of the complexities of the careers of women intellectuals in the Victorian period reveal the 'discordant, harmonious and complex relations between different politics, different texts and different imperatives.' (151) As we have seen in chapter 1 where David's ideas are discussed, Harriet Martineau's career was defined by David as that of 'auxiliary usefulness.'

Harriet Martineau's position as an early feminist rather than an intellectual, however, was the main focus of feminist reappraisal of her work. Pichanick addressed this in some detail in her biographical volume. However, in an earlier article, written in 1977, she offered a much sharper analysis of Harriet Martineau's brand of feminism. (152) Here Pichanick argued that Harriet Martineau's defence of women was almost identical to that of Mary Wollstonecraft, expressed in her works *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). 'Both [women] believed that equal education and equal employment would restore lost dignities. Both believed in the compatibility of intellectual exercise and domestic duty'. Yet, Harriet Martineau was critical of her feminist predecessor because she felt Wollstonecraft's perceived immoral behaviour had 'let the side down'

- better advocates of the cause would be the 'happy wives' or 'contented single women'. (153)

Further, according to Pichanick, Harriet Martineau was a stern critic both of contemporary legislation which denied married women control over their own property, and of the assumed subordination of wives in marriage. She was also, for a nineteenth-century woman, exceptionally frank in her discussion of sexual matters, such as birth-control and prostitution. Pichanick claimed that it was impossible to estimate the degree of influence that Harriet Martineau's feminism had on her contemporaries, though articles of hers, as I have already shown, provided an impetus to the nineteenth-century women's movement. In fact, Pichanick claims that Harriet Martineau's ideas on women's employment and women's equality within marriage were far in advance of the suffrage movement later in the century and, in fact, are still highly relevant.

If she could have looked more than a century hence, Martineau would have been disappointed to find that although the laws have been changed and conditions improved, *de facto* emancipation has not yet been achieved, and that some women are only now beginning to ask the questions which she so long ago posed about the role and place of women.

(Pichanick V. K., (1977), 'An Abominable Submission: Harriet Martineau's views on the role and place of women', *Women's Studies*, 5, 1, p 32)

In summary, the most notable feature about writing on Harriet Martineau during this period is that it was heavily influenced by the modern women's movement. As a consequence, there was little

discussion about Harriet Martineau's appearance or personality, and much more detailed analysis of the precise nature of her contributions to a whole range of disciplines and spheres of interest. Feminists involved in literary criticism, for example, claimed Harriet Martineau as an innovator of a number of nineteenth-century literary genres and others noted her historical legacy to the social sciences.

Interest in the underlying reasons for Harriet Martineau's atypical and enormously varied life and sometimes extraordinary actions, has been continued to be expressed, as in other periods. However the analyses undertaken in this context have been both scholarly (rather than speculative, as in earlier work) and informed by the work of contemporary feminist theorists such as Nancy Chodorow. (154)

Nonetheless the main emphasis has still remained the same, as for other periods; on Harriet Martineau as an early role model for women, and as one of the first nineteenth century advocates of equality for women.

* * * * *

In reviewing the commentaries on Harriet Martineau produced during the last century and a half, it becomes apparent that biographical accounts reflect as much about individual commentators as about their scrutiny and evaluation of the evidence. In fact, David Bromwich claims that biographies have more to do with their writers than their subjects since biographers radically alter the images of

their subjects as interest in subjects' work tends to give way to sharpening interest in their lives. (155)

It must also be recognised that accounts may differ because later commentaries have had more primary sources and a fuller literature at their disposal. However, authors have drawn, for the most part, on the same material; the Autobiography, the Illustrations, Deerbrook, Society in America and, to a lesser extent, Harriet Martineau's other published work.

Those who were hostile either to Harriet Martineau's political views or to her female intellectual lifestyle, were more likely to focus on the inconsistencies in her arguments, the deficiencies in her personality and appearance, and on her atypical activities as a woman. Those who were favourably disposed to her ideas, usually drawn from more politically progressive elements in British and American society, were sometimes as much concerned with defending her reputation against the often personal and abusive attacks of her detractors, than with a genuine reappraisal of her contribution to nineteenth century culture and ideas.

The concentration of material in this thesis has thus far embraced Harriet Martineau's own work and the large number of critical and biographical commentaries on that work. It seems impossible, and is also not my intention, to construct a new biography of Harriet Martineau. Neither does it appear appropriate to undertake a more comprehensive evaluation of all the work of her commentators.

Instead, I take the case of Harriet Martineau's life and work as reflecting the dilemmas and complexities of a feminist, living and working in a highly patriarchal yet volatile period of history; and see the importance of her legacy of publications as in enabling future generations to understand how their culture came to be formed. Additionally, I have inevitably drawn on this legacy of publications and commentaries to understand how individual readings are formed and assessments made. It has been particularly illuminating in exploring Harriet Martineau's significance as both a subject of research and a creation of text. An exploration of some of the theoretical implications of this material will form the basis for the discussion on approaches to the writing of lives contained in the next two chapters.

NOTES

1. Extracts from a lecture delivered by James Hollings to the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, (1858), *The English Woman's Journal*, 1 August, p. 279.
2. Letters from John Sterling to Sarah Austin, 9 July 1832, quoted in Ross J., (1893), *Three Generations of Englishwomen*, London, John Murray, pp.86-7; and from Ward to Coates, 7 December 1832, S.D.U.K. Letters, London, University College.
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4. Croker J. W., (1833), 'Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels', *Quarterly Review*, 1107, April, p. 151.
5. Unattributed, (1833), 'Miss Harriet Martineau', *Fraser's Magazine*, 152, November, p. 576.
6. Horne R. H., (1844), *A New Spirit of the Age*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., pp. 72-3.
7. *Norwich Mercury*, 2 June 1832: Letter from Lucy Aikin to W. E. Channing, 15 October 1832 and from W.E. Channing to Lucy Aikin, 30 May 1833, reproduced in Le Breton A. L., (ed.), (1874), *Correspondence of William Ellery Channing and Lucy Aikin from 1826 to 1842*, Boston, pp. 148, 172-3.
8. Reviews of the Illustrations appeared in the *Spectator*: (1832) 4 February, 3 March, 4 August, 3 November; (1833) 4 January. Letter from Henry Brougham to Lord Napier, 17 July 1832, quoted in Webb R. K., (1960), *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*, London, Heinemann, p. 122.
9. Unattributed, (1832), *Athenaeum*, May 19, quoted in Webb, *op cit.*, p. 121.
10. Martineau H., (1841), *The Hour and the Man*, London, Edward Moxon.
11. La Breton, *op cit.*, 3, p. 236.
12. Crabb Robinson, (1840), *Crabb Robinson Letters and Diaries*, London, Dr. William's Library Trustees, 15 December.
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14. Macaulay T. B., (1848), *History of England from the Accession of James II*, 1849-61 edn., ed. Lady Trevelyan, London, Longman & Co.

15. Unattributed, (1849), 'Review of Deerbrook', *Athenaeum*, 1118, March, pp. 317-319.
16. Eliot G., 2-3 February 1858, quoted in Haight G. S., (ed.), (1954-5), *George Eliot Letters*, 2, New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 430.
17. Letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mr. Boyd, 4 October 1844, quoted in Webb, *op cit.*, p. 40.
18. W. R. Greg quoted in Bosanquet T. (1827), *Harriet Martineau: an Essay in Comprehension*, London, Etchells & Macdonald, p. 211.
19. Mary Russell Mitford, quoted in Wheatley V., (1957), *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau*, London, Secker & Warburg, p. 340.
20. Adams H. G., (1865), *A Cyclopoedia of Female Biography - Consisting of Sketches on Women*, Glasgow, Robert Forrester, p. 523.
21. Howitt W., (1846), *People's Journal*, p. 141.
22. Letter from Thomas Carlyle to M. A. Carlyle, 20 November 1836, quoted in Sanders C. R. & Fielding K. J., (eds.), (1970), *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Carlyle*, Duke/Edinburgh edn., North Carolina, Durham, p. 88.
23. Harriet Martineau laid out the case for the destruction of her correspondence in, Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 1, London, Smith Elder & Co., pp. 3-8.
24. See, for example, Wheatley V., (1957), *op cit.*, p 366-396.
25. Holyoake J., (1876), *National Reformer*, 9 July. Charles Bradlaugh, editor of the *National Reformer*, and Annie Besant together formed the Freethought Publishing Company and republished Charles Knowlton's 1832 work *The Fruits of Philosophy* advocating birth control. The publication created a public storm and both Bradlaugh and Besant were brought to trial in 1877, convicted and imprisoned though they were later released on appeal.
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27. Holyoake J., (1876), *The Index*, 28 December.
28. Letter from James Payn to Jane Martineau, quoted in Wheatley, *op cit.*, p. 391.
29. Richardson H. S. (1877), 'Harriet Martineau's account of herself', *Contemporary Review*, 29, p. 1112. This article draws on an obituary written by Harriet Martineau about herself which appeared in the *Daily News* on 29 June 1876, immediately after her death.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 1122.

31. Ibid., pp. 1122-3.
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33. Unattributed, (1876), 'Harriet Martineau', English Woman's Review, 39, 15 July, p. 289.
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38. Ibid., p. 81.
39. Ibid., p. 89.
40. Ibid., p. 93.
41. Ibid., p. 51.
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49. Ibid., p. 75.
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CHAPTER 4

YET ANOTHER BIOGRAPHY!

RE-PRESENTING HARRIET MARTINEAU

As we have seen, Harriet Martineau enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a writer, journalist and political campaigner. What is not immediately apparent is why her life was so contentious. Why was she perceived with such admiration by some and so much hostility by others?

The remainder of this thesis explores these complexities by revisiting Harriet Martineau's life and work with a particular focus on, what I hope I have established as, the dilemmas and contradictions of a feminist living in nineteenth century England. The originality of the account is three-fold: it builds upon material only recently recognised as having been written by Harriet Martineau ⁽¹⁾; it updates the survey of commentary on her work; and it does so, consciously, from the feminist viewpoint of acknowledging her as influential to our culture.

Inevitably, in this type of account, many details remain the same as in the accounts of others (eg personal details, publications, circle of friends) but the emphases, interpretations and evaluations are different. As I have shown, Harriet Martineau was commended and criticised by her contemporaries, depending on the colour of their politics; eulogised by feminists writing at the end of the century; viewed as an interesting, if narrow-minded and sometimes unwise,

nineteenth-century eccentric, in the first decades of the twentieth century; and finally reclaimed once more by feminists from the 1970s onwards as an important 'foremother' of modern feminism. A consistent theme throughout, however, was her role as a nineteenth century woman reformer and innovator. How can these differences in perception be understood?

The study of Harriet Martineau's life and work also raises a variety of methodological problems. For example, she wrote on a wide range of subjects almost continuously for fifty years, producing over fifty books, more than 1500 leaders for the *Daily News* and numerous other journal and newspaper articles. As we have seen, she was accorded eminence in a surprisingly large number of areas, for example, political economy, the 'Woman Question', education, journalism, sociology, reform campaigns, travels, literature (as a novelist and writer of children's books), autobiography, and as champion of the disabled. This study, thus, has needed to address the problems of selection and focus.

Further, how does the variety of interpretations offered by Harriet Martineau's commentators relate to the general treatment of women historically? First, we have the issues raised by feminist historiography. Since the 1970s, there has been heightened interest in the history of women and in feminist historiography. Debates have focused on the apparent invisibility of women in mainstream history. Have women deliberately been marginalised or excluded from the historical record; and if so, why? What have been the criteria

whereby women's experiences have been judged peripheral to mainstream historical concerns?

Second, we have the issue of the study of textuality; in this case, those written by Harriet Martineau and her biographers and commentators. In an important sense, it is also a study of *subtexts*. If, as Saussure claims, language is a set of social practices which makes it possible for people to construct a meaningful world of individuals and things, '2' then examination of the sub-text of Harriet Martineau's life and work is vital to a critical appreciation.

Thus, in this thesis, texts are treated as constructions of experience rather than descriptive accounts of events and experiences for those who cannot be present. Texts are viewed as standing between the author's intention and the reader's interpretation; and as constructed according to what are designated as interesting events at any particular time, how we seek to explain those events, and for whom we are writing. Similarly, the interpretation of texts depends on the multiplicity of subjectivities that accompany their readers.

From this perspective, creators of texts are representative of particular social and political groupings and their accounts need to be deconstructed according to the philosophies and ethics of such groupings. To fully appreciate Harriet Martineau's writing, therefore, demands some understanding of the theoretical, social and

economic context in which she made sense of her world. Thus, Harriet Martineau's own work, particularly her autobiography, cannot be understood only as a descriptive record of her life. It is also a selective construction of events, in this case, of a female intellectual endeavouring to cut out a place for herself in the male-defined world of Victorian political and literary life, written for a new generation.

Additionally, each interpretation of her work builds upon the distinctive social and political viewpoint of its author. Some interpretations are more enduring than others. For example, similar pro- and anti-feminist responses can be detected to the *Autobiography* when it first appeared in 1877 and when it was republished by Virago in 1983. As I have shown, Harriet drew admiration and support from feminists and radicals and scorn from the Tory press when it was first published. Similarly, in 1983, she was headlined as 'Victorian Virago' and 'Harridan of Virtue' respectively by the conservative newspapers *The Spectator* and *The Times* and as 'Nineteenth Century Economist' and 'Victorian Fighter for Women's Rights' by the more politically progressive *Morning Star* and *Birmingham Post*. (3)

Moreover, as I have shown, the emphasis on appearance and personality traits which appeared in early twentieth century biographies can only be properly understood as deriving from the period's heightened interest in eugenics and psychology. Thus, in fusing evidence and interpretation, biographers and commentators

construct Harriet Martineau as an object of historiography in new forms. And, likewise, readers of Harriet Martineau's work and that of her biographers are equally socially and culturally embedded. This makes a 'true' evaluation of Harriet Martineau's work highly suspect. Which of Harriet Martineau's biographers comes closest to revealing the 'truth' about her life? How can Harriet Martineau's own evaluation of herself, or the reassessment made of her for this thesis, be understood?

These debates necessarily illuminate the subjectivity of my own version of her biography which now follows - as well my earlier discussion of her work. Yet, they do not invalidate the account. They merely draw attention to the complexities of attempting to map current understandings on to people and events of the past.

A Personal Version of Harriet Martineau's Life

Harriet Martineau died at sunset on June 27 1876, at the age of seventy-six, in the house that she had built for herself just outside the village of Ambleside in the Lake District. She was buried among her kinfolk in Birmingham. Her death came as no surprise to her family and friends as she had been ill for many years, though they were clearly saddened by her passing.

The English, American and European Press all paid tribute to her work as a writer, journalist and political campaigner. The editor of the *Daily News* even went so far as to print the somewhat

premature obituary that Harriet had written over twenty years before. Harriet was also mourned by feminists of the period: for example, the *English Woman's Review* described her, in 1876, as 'one of the greatest women that our generation has known'. ⁽⁴⁾ Yet, some people wondered why so much attention was being paid to this woman from a bygone age: after all, as Mrs Oliphant pointed out, Harriet Martineau's fame had been at its height in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, some two or three decades previously. ⁽⁵⁾ Clearly, at the time of her death, there was disagreement about Harriet's historical legacy - and, as we have seen, this has continued among her biographers and commentators, to the present day. Who, then, was this seemingly problematic figure?

She was born in 1802, the sixth of eight children of a Norwich Unitarian family. Her parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Martineau, belonged to the Dissenting professional and manufacturing middle classes and were direct descendants of the Huguenots, driven out of France in the seventeenth century by the withdrawal from non-Catholics of freedom of worship. They were also Unitarians, a factor that had immense influence on Harriet's intellectual development, as I shall show later.

At the time of her birth, Harriet's father was a reasonably prosperous manufacturer of bombazines (twilled silk and cotton cloth), but later his death and the failure of the family business was to lead Harriet to take up her prodigiously successful literary career. The house in Magdelene Street, Norwich, in which the

Martineau family lived still exists, and provides an effective reminder of the level of prosperity and bourgeois existence of families of the newly emerging middle class in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

As we have already seen, Harriet experienced an unhappy childhood, portraying herself as sickly, withdrawn, diffident, and full of fears - a difficult child whom nobody loved or wanted to be with. '6) She reports neither sense of taste nor smell and seemed unable to elicit understanding, sympathy or support from her parents in respect of her disabilities. James Martineau, her brother, questioned whether her childhood was indeed as miserable as she describes '7), and there is some evidence that Harriet had considerable respect and felt warmly towards her older brothers and sisters. Moreover, she had a great affection for her younger siblings; James, her younger brother by three years, and Ellen, the youngest in the family. Harriet was devoted to James, and until the break with him over her declared atheism, consulted him on a wide range of matters. Of Ellen who was born when Harriet was nine years old, she wrote:

That child was henceforth a new life to me. I did lavish love and tenderness on her; and I could almost say that she never caused me a moment's pain but by her own sorrows.

(Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1, pp. 51-2)

However, Harriet's recollection (or re-construction) of the coolness

of her mother towards her probably provided the foundation for her later orientation, intellectually and socially, towards men, despite her identification with women's issues. For example, she reports in the Autobiography that a friend, Ann Turner, tried to convince her of her mother's affection thus: 'She asked me why my mother sat up sewing so diligently for us children, and sat up late at night to mend my stockings, if she did not care for me'. ⁽⁸⁾ Hence, as Sanders points out, although Harriet had many female friends during her lifetime and established 'close, natural relationships with her nieces and maids', she appeared to attach a special value to male advice and encouragement. ⁽⁹⁾

Whatever conclusions can be drawn from Harriet's parents treatment of her or their methods of upbringing, Harriet placed most of the blame for her unhappy childhood on her mother. Her father escaped censure, being portrayed as a benign, if rather shadowy figure. In contrast, though reasonably benevolent towards her sisters, most of her most warmly remembered occasions involved her brothers.

Despite the problems with her parents, Harriet received an exceptionally broad education for a girl growing up in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In her earlier years, she was educated at home in the classics, languages, English composition and mathematics, and later attended two Unitarian schools; the first, with her sister Rachel, was an 'excellent' local school run by an ex-minister Isaac Perry; and the second, which she attended alone in her early teens in Bristol, was run by the eminent Unitarian

minister and theologian, Lant Carpenter, father of the reformer, Mary Carpenter.

Of the first school, she wrote that it proved an invaluable and formative experience. 'Our two year's schooling seemed like a lifetime to look back upon: and to this day it fills a disproportionate space in the retrospect of my existence, - so inestimable was its importance'. (10)

She was sent to the Bristol school as much to increase her physical fitness as to further her studies - for Lant Carpenter had an immense belief in the value of physical activities, particularly in the formation of morals and the intellect.

Lant Carpenter...postulated that physical education was at the heart of both intellectual and moral excellence and moral excellence though detrimental if pursued as an end itself, just as mental and moral culture would defeat their own ends if pursued without reference to physical health. Girls, like boys, required sensible clothing, fresh air and exercise.

(Watts R., 1980, 'The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education (1790-1850)', History of Education. 9, 4, p. 279)

Harriet also noted a trait which appeared at the time of her departure from Lant Carpenter's establishment, and which was to reveal itself on several occasions later in her life; a tendency to hero-worship.

I returned home raving about my pastor and teacher, remembering every word he had ever spoken to me, - with his instructions burnt in, as it were, upon my heart and conscience, and with an

abominable spiritual rigidity and a truly respectable force of conscience curiously mingled together, so as to procure for me the no less curiously mingled ridicule and respect of my family.

(Martineau, op. cit., 1. p. 96)

When resident in Norwich, Harriet was frequently dispatched to relatives in the country, her Aunt Kentish in Bristol for example, in the hope of improving her health. But despite her declared unhappiness, she was always frantically homesick. The nadir of her young life came in early adolescence when deafness was added to her other infirmities, though she retained sufficient hearing later in life to communicate with the aid of a celebrated ear trumpet. She first noticed an impairment of hearing at the age of 12 - 'It was a very slight, scarcely perceptible hardness of hearing at that time'. But, by the time she was 16, it had become 'very noticeable, very inconvenient and excessively painful to myself'. ⁽¹¹⁾ Moreover, her family tended to blame Harriet for her inability to hear.

I believe my family would have almost made any sacrifice to save me from my misfortune; but not the less did they aggravate it terribly by their way of treating it. First, and for long, they insisted that it was all my own fault, - that I was so absent, - that I never cared to attend to anything that was said, - that I ought to listen this way, or that, or the other; and even (while my heart was breaking) they told me that 'none are so deaf as those that won't hear'

(Ibid., p. 76)

Later, Harriet grew to believe that 'this hard discipline' was ultimately formative as it made her independent and enabled her to take greater control of her destiny. Perhaps these experiences did,

indeed, provide her with the thicker skin necessary to survive in the competitive world that she eventually chose.

Though Harriet had serious reservations about her mother's feelings for her, being convinced that her older sister by two years, Rachel, was much preferred, she developed a very strong attachment to her younger brother James. As we have seen, she studied with him when he lived at home and corresponded regularly with him when he was away at school and college. It was James, probably another object of hero-worship, later to become a noted Unitarian minister and theologian, who first suggested that Harriet should take up her pen.

She describes her emotional turmoil at his early betrothal (at the age of seventeen) and her feeling of betrayal at his affection for his future wife though, interestingly, she shows some awareness of the structural powerlessness of her position.

In the history of human affections, of all natural relations the least satisfactory is the fraternal. Brothers are to sisters what sisters can never be to brothers as objects of engrossing and devoted affection.

(Ibid., p. 99)

At the end of her formal education, Harriet continued to read and study, often getting up very early in the morning and reading long into the night, to allow for the completion of her daytime domestic duties. For example, she describes her intellectual endeavour at the age of 18 thus:

I had a strange passion for translating in those days; and a good preparation it proved for the subsequent work of my life. Now, it was meeting James at seven in the morning to read Lowth's Prelections in the Latin, after having been busy since five about something else in my own room. Now it was translating Tacitus, in order to try what was the utmost compression of style that I could attain.

(Ibid., p. 101)

At the age of 19 or 20, when girls of a similar age thought mainly of prospective suitors or marriage, Harriet became deeply interested in religious and philosophical questions. She was also converted to 'necessarianism', a philosophy deriving from the arch-Unitarian Joseph Priestley. At this time, Unitarian ideas were at the height of their influence on Harriet's thinking, so a closer look at this important, intellectual, dissenting sect - even if sometimes also 'small' and 'despised' as suggested by Watts, ⁽¹²⁾ - seems appropriate.

Though its numbers never rose above 50,000 in Britain, women who were Unitarians or who had strong connections with Unitarianism were among the most eminent of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of them were also attracted to feminist ideas, Besides Harriet, they included Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), Mary Somerville (1780-1872), George Eliot (1819-1880), Mary Carpenter (1807-1877), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858), Barbara Bodichon (1827-1890), Bessie Rayner Parkes (1828-1925), Elizabeth Reid (1789-1866), Louise Twining (1820-1911) and Frances Power Cobb (1822-1904). ⁽¹³⁾

Clearly, there was something about Unitarian philosophy and culture which provided the motivation for women to achieve in their own right, even in so rigid a patriarchal society as that of nineteenth-century England. Moreover, high achieving men such as William Gladstone, Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens were also attracted to Unitarian ideas. (14)

How did Unitarianism emerge as this important intellectual force in the nineteenth-century? Modern Unitarianism dates historically from the Reformation era though the unipersonality of God was occasionally voiced in the early church and also within Judaism. John Biddle, who published Unitarian tracts and who, between 1658 and 1662, held clandestine meetings in London, is generally reckoned to be the founder of Unitarianism in England. (15) Over a hundred years later Joseph Priestley defended Unitarian non-conformist and anti-Trinitarian principles in his *Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity* (1770).

By the end of the century several Presbyterian sects including the Arians and the Socinians had joined the Unitarians, and Unitarianism had become deeply affected by the beginnings of modern science and by rationalism. Most importantly, as far as their contemporaries were concerned, Unitarians believed in the *humanity*, rather than the *divinity*, of Christ. According to the historian Halevy, 'the Gospels, they maintained, teach us that there is but one God only, that the person of Jesus is not consubstantial with the person of

the Father, that Christ is a created Divinity, no older than the universe of which He is the Saviour.' (16)

At the time of Harriet's birth, all non-conformists were denied access to offices of prestige and power. As Webb points out, any group excluded in such a way is likely to make a virtue of that exclusion. (17) Among the Unitarians this phenomenon took various forms, one of which was a strong tendency to political radicalism. They were deeply critical of the establishment and its theological principles, and strove to develop rational and theological underpinnings for their challenge to the *status quo*. Thus, they rejected doctrines of original sin and the essential depravity of humankind in favour, according to Watts, of a 'fresh more generous view of humanity for all'. (18)

Drawing on secular debates from the Enlightenment, and encouraged by the ideas emerging from revolutionary France, they developed an optimistic belief in the progress of civilisation and in the ultimate perfectibility of humankind. In Harriet's words, they believed 'the human race...[to be] advancing under the laws of progress'. (19)

Unitarians drew, in particular, on various works of John Locke and David Hartley (20). Harriet, as we have seen, was also to make much use of Priestley's doctrine of 'necessity'. Priestley traced the rise of necessitarianism to Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written in 1651, in which 'liberty' and 'necessity' were viewed as consonant.

According to Priestley, the results of 'cause' and 'effect' were interconnected:

How little soever the bulk of mankind might be apprehensive of it, or staggered by it, according to the established laws of nature, no event could have been otherwise than it *has been* or *is to be*, and therefore all things past, present and to come, are precisely what the Author of nature really intended them to be, and has made provision for.

(Priestley J., (1777) *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, 3, London, p. 462)

As Webb suggests, this view, stripped of its theological beliefs or its 'Author', is little different from social science doctrines, such as positivism, which ruled nineteenth-century science and which were also applied to political economy. ⁽²¹⁾

The importance of education for necessarians, was to provide understanding of the natural laws of science and society, and through enlightened self-discipline, actively work to improve the world. Thus, Unitarian educationalists such as Lant Carpenter and Harriet herself, as we have seen, advocated a radically, new 'progressive' education which would encourage rational thought and also suit the demands of an increasingly scientific and industrial age. In such ways, Unitarians would raise the knowledge, status, and ultimately the power of the expanding industrial and commercial middle-classes, at the same time as improving the social conditions and motivation of the 'lower orders'.

Unitarian commitment to social improvement led them to espouse a wide range of politically progressive causes including Philosophical Radicalism, Utilitarianism and the 'Woman Question'; though *laissez-faire*, paternalist, capitalist approaches were preferred to communalistic or socialist ideas such as those of Robert Owen and his followers. (21)

The implications of these beliefs for women such as Harriet were considerable. If inequalities were the result of upbringing, then the inferiority and disadvantages hitherto experienced by women were modifiable. Contemporary assumptions, such as those of Rousseau, that female virtue was formed through social and religious restraint, were rejected. Instead, women's moral influence was to be developed through sound intellectual education. Thus, not only did the daughters of Unitarian families receive a broadly liberal education similar (though generally inferior) to their brothers, but they had access to the popular texts of the day and could engage in intellectual talk at the dinner table. Certainly this was the case for Harriet.

At a time when interest in feminism was relatively low, Unitarians were active in keeping the 'Woman Question' in the public eye. Harriet, as we have seen, did much to maintain interest in the cause of women during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century but other Unitarian women were also active. For example, Bedford College for Women was founded in 1849 by Mrs. Reid, a Unitarian friend of Harriet's. And Barbara Leigh-Smith (later Bodichon) and Bessie Rayner Parkes founded the *Englishwoman's Journal* and started the first employment bureau for women in 1858, thus signalling the beginning of the nineteenth-century women's movement. Moreover, other women with Unitarian connections made important contributions to science (eg Mary Somerville), reform (eg Florence Nightingale), literature (eg George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell), and philanthropy (eg Mary Carpenter, Louisa Twining)

Even if she broke with Unitarianism later in life, it is evident that Harriet's religious origins had a profound effect on her life and work. Not only did she use Unitarian networks to sustain her during periods of crisis; for example, Elizabeth Reid nursed her through bouts of ill health at Ambleside. ⁽²³⁾ She also utilised Unitarian convictions and reform interests for the topics and issues on which she chose to campaign, for example, education, political economy, social reform; and she drew on her Unitarian upbringing for the moral strength and motivation to lead so active and exhausting a life.

Significantly, Harriet's first published articles, in the influential Unitarian periodical the *Monthly Repository*, were concerned with women. The first two, published in 1822, were on the subject of 'Female Writers of

Practical Divinity' and another produced a year later was entitled 'Female Education' and called for educational equality for girls. (24)

The third decade of Harriet's life started more happily than the earlier two. She had now become more reconciled to her family and was writing on a wide range of topics, and on a regular basis, for the *Monthly Repository*. However, in the mid 1820s, a quadruple blow hit the Martineau family which was to damage the stability of family life beyond repair, yet also provide Harriet with unimagined opportunities for personal and intellectual fulfilment. Harriet's eldest and much loved brother, Richard, died of consumption; the family business started to deteriorate as a result of the financial crises of 1825; the failure of the business caused her father's health to so deteriorate that he died a year later; and finally a young student friend of James, to whom Harriet had become betrothed, had a nervous collapse and died within months of their betrothal. (25)

As we have seen, Harriet regarded her escape from marriage as a necessary prerequisite to her literary career and future, chosen life-style. But, in the *Autobiography*, we gain some indication of other reasons for the profound relief that she clearly felt: the very low self-image she had in her younger years and her fear of taking responsibility for another person's happiness. On her betrothal she describes her feelings as follows:

He now came to me and we were soon virtually engaged. I was at first very anxious and unhappy. My veneration for his *morale* was such that I felt I dared not undertake the charge of his happiness: and yet I dared not refuse, because I said it would be his death blow. I was

ill, - I was deaf, - I was in an entangled state of mind between conflicting duties and some lower considerations; and many a time did I wish, in my fear that I should fail, that I had never seen him.

(Martineau, Op cit., 1, pp. 130-1)

By the time of these calamitous events, James had already married and moved away to Dublin. The remaining Martineau family were confronted with problems of financial hardship for the first time in their lives. The family business collapsed and as Harriet puts it, 'my mother and her daughters lost, at a stroke, nearly all they had in the world...We never recovered more than the merest pittance; and, at the time, I, for one, was left destitute'. ⁽²⁶⁾ Additionally, Harriet had lost the opportunity for marriage.

However, the education, so painstakingly acquired by the girls, was to prove the mainstay of family survival. Only three daughters, Rachel, Harriet and the youngest, Ellen, now remained at home with the formidable Mrs. Martineau. Since teaching was one of the only forms of employment deemed suitable for educated middle-class women, Rachel acquired a post as governess and later became headteacher of Liverpool Girls' School, to which Mrs. Gaskell sent one of her daughters. Ellen was assigned to teach the children of the extended Martineau family and the virtually deaf Harriet was, ironically, in view of their poor relationship, deputed to stay at home with her mother.

Obligated to contribute to the family income in some way, and encouraged by her mother, Harriet initially earned a little money through 'fancy sewing'. However, while she was always careful not to denigrate domestic activities

of women such as sewing and cooking, Harriet's ambitions clearly did not lie in these household pursuits. Her literary ambitions had now been boosted: overtly, by the need to generate income and psychologically, by the wish either or both to seek independence from her mother and gain, at last, her mother's approval.

Thus, the family income was soon supplemented by earnings from articles in the *Monthly Repository*; books of devotional exercises, prayers and theological discussions published in 1826, 1830, and 1831 ⁽²⁷⁾; moral tales published in 1827, 1828 and 1829 ⁽²⁸⁾; and a children's book which emerged in 1831. ⁽²⁹⁾ Harriet also won all three prizes in a Unitarian essay competition in 1829, and was able to travel to Dublin to visit her brother James on the proceeds. ⁽³⁰⁾ Additionally, as we have seen, she wrote 89 'articles, reviews, tales, poems and sketches' for the *Monthly Repository* in 1830 and 1831. While I would not go as far as Mineka in suggesting that Harriet was a recluse at this period of her life ⁽³¹⁾, it was clearly a time for reflection: in which Harriet was, simultaneously, developing her writing and communication skills and formulating the project which was to change her life.

National fame and stature was eventually attained, as we have seen, when she published, against all advice and dire predictions on the part of the reluctant publisher Charles Fox, an immensely successful twenty-five part series of books *Illustrations of Political Economy*. ⁽³²⁾ The aim was to interpret for lay readers, in monthly fictionalised instalments, the principles of political economy as understood by the Utilitarians and those who advocated free trade and *laissez-faire* policies. ⁽³³⁾ A hundred and

fifty years on the series might seem didactic, contrived and limited in conception, though it clearly demanded considerable intellectual breadth, commitment and energy on the part of its author. Nevertheless, it became an instant best-seller, probably, as David suggests, because it was articulating in lay-person's language, the visionary ideas of an emerging, potentially powerful, new class. ⁽³⁴⁾ It also captured the optimism of the time for the resolution of all societal ills through rational explanation and the development and expansion of scientific ideas; whether pure, natural, social or political.

At a personal level, the importance of the series lay in its solution to Harriet's financial problems, not an inconsiderable achievement given her sex and the instability of the times. Her relief was immense.

I remember walking up and down on the grass-plot feeling that my cares were over. And so they were. From that hour, I have never had any other anxiety about employment than what I choose, nor any real care about money...I think I may date my release from pecuniary care from the 10th of February 1832 (the publishing date of the first volume).

(Ibid., p. 178)

Harriet moved to London to complete the series and was at once taken up (or 'lionised') by London society. She had moved from Norwich to continue researching and writing the series, and was forced to exercise considerable self-discipline in the face of numerous social invitations and requests to visit her home, in order to complete the regular production of the monthly volumes. Nevertheless, in her two years in London she took the opportunity to meet the literary and intellectual elite of the day ⁽³⁵⁾. She met and corresponded with famous artists, writers and reformers and was consulted

by government about the reform measures being considered for legislation, including the 1832 Reform Bill.

In her two and a half years stay in London, she finished the Political Economy series and also other commissioned works on government and the Poor Law, 34 volumes in all. Not surprisingly, she was exhausted at the end of this ordeal: 'After tea, I went into St. James's Park for the first thoroughly holiday walk I had taken for two years and a half. It felt very like flying'. (36)

She now decided to use some of the £2,000 she eventually earned from the series to finance a two year trip to the United States. She was one of the first English women to travel to North America, and with only a female companion and a vast number of introductory letters, she travelled widely and was well received wherever she went. Her fame had preceded her and Harriet enjoyed celebrity treatment until she publically allied herself to the militant Garrisonian branch of the anti-slavery movement. Thereafter, she became a hero of the Abolitionists and on several occasions narrowly escaped lynchings from their opponents. (37)

As we have seen, she was fascinated by the Americans and at the same time, deeply critical of American institutions and way of life. She had expected rather more of the new democracy which, in her view, was not so shackled as the older European states were, by inflexible social systems and historical conservatism. Before travelling to America, Harriet had been optimistic about the position of women there - so her criticism and outrage was strongest regarding the exclusion from the franchise of women and blacks

and the petty social restrictions and controls placed on American women within family life. It is also clear that comparing cultures helped considerably to sharpen her ideas on women.

In fact, Harriet saw herself as one of the few advocates of the 'Woman Question' in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and later, as we have seen, as out of touch with the 'Woman Missionaries' of the following generation. However, her perceived isolation on this issue did not mean that feminism was lost during this period. Rather, it meant that feminist activities were diffuse, often identified within revolutionary politics or evangelicalism rather than the Enlightenment feminism of which Harriet was part.

Certainly, Utopian Socialism and Owenism offered for a brief period, as Rendall suggests, the prospect of a better world 'based on the transformation of both work and domestic life, drawing upon an older view of economic partnership in the household and in the family, and a newer one of moral strength for women'. (38) Yet, it was not the predominant form of feminism during this period. And whilst evangelicalism provided powerful imagery which gave strength to particular qualities of womanhood, leading feminists, as Rendall again observes, shifted towards 'the rationalism of Unitarianism, towards Quakerism or to secularism'. (39) Moreover, then (as now?) feminism tended to attract middle-class women, that is, the daughters of the non-conformist factory owners and industrialists, rather than ordinary female workers.

Thus, although Harriet felt isolated, she was more typically feminist during this period that she might have supposed. As Banks shows, there were a number of such feminists, all born before 1828, in what Banks identifies as the first generation of the women's movement.

Active, in many cases, even before there was an organised movement, it included pioneering women like Caroline Norton, who, born in 1808, successfully staged managed the first piece of feminist legislation in 1839...Other significant feminists in this cohort include some of the earliest pioneers in the education of girls, like Anne Jemima Clough, Frances Mary Buss and the two Shirreff sisters, as well as most of the Owenite socialist feminists like Anna Wheeler and Frances Wright.

(Banks O., (1986), *Becoming a Feminist: the Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf Books, p. 4) (40)

However, Harriet had good reason to think that she was one of only a few, carrying women's issues forward during this period. As Taylor (41) shows, there were a number of individual feminist activists who had emerged during the first decades of the nineteenth century; for example, Anna Wheeler (1785-), Emma Martin (1812-51), Fanny Wright (1795-1852), William Thompson (1775-1883), all from the Owenite Cooperative wing of feminism, and the socialist, millenarianist feminist Johanna Southcott (1750-1814). Also active were the often Unitarian, middle-class feminists of more liberal persuasion. Yet, there was no organised movement specifically devoted to the 'Woman Question' and the number of feminists was generally very low. Thus, each was likely to feel visible, isolated and threatened.

Yet the emergence...of feminist movements, should not obscure the fact that the numbers involved were very small and that such women were indeed isolated and frequently ridiculed, treated with brutal hostility and even imprisoned. Their aspirations, for the recognition of political or civil equality, for the possibility of choice, to participate in public life, to take up employment...may indeed seem modest to twentieth-century feminists and historians: but an

understanding of the development of occupational segregation of the late twentieth century will suggest how long such hopes have waited for fulfilment.

(Rendall J., (1985), *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, p. 321)

Considerably invigorated by her trip to North America, Harriet wrote three books on her experiences as a traveller on her return in 1836. The first, *Society in America* was a critical analysis of American social and political life and was particularly scathing in its criticism of the political status and social role of American women and of slavery. The second *How to Observe* explored the methodologies and day-to-day strategies necessary for travellers who wanted to understand the cultures of the countries which they were visiting. And the third and most popular, *Retrospect of Western Travel* was a conventional, though rather superior, travel book. (42)

Her authorship of *Deerbrook* in 1839, the more successful of only two adult novels in her vast literary output, marked an important watershed in her life. Soon after its publication to disappointingly mixed reviews, Harriet's health collapsed and she went to Tynmouth as an invalid anticipating imminent death. (43) Though she was in extremely poor health for five years until 'miraculously' cured by mesmerism (or hypnosis), she continued to write throughout this period. She finished her series of 'chatty textbooks' *Guides to Service* which appeared between 1838 and 1840. She also produced her second novel, *The Hour and the Man* (1841), about the popular black Haitian leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, a number of highly successful children's books in the *Playfellow Series* (1841), and reprinted

many times since then and a volume on her experiences as an invalid *Life in the Sickroom*. (44)

After her period of illness, a common phenomenon of Victorian women's lives according to Showalter (45) - possibly the consequence of a psychological need for individual space after so many years of continuous work - Harriet moved to Ambleside in the Lake District. Here she became part of a writers' colony which counted among its members William Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold. She also, while at Ambleside, took the prefix 'Mrs.' to denote her mature years, began to smoke (for health reasons!) and surrounded herself with female nieces and servants.

She continued her literary output, producing books on a variety of issues of contemporary interest including mesmerism, education, history, farming, politics, philosophy, and biography. (46) She travelled to the East and wrote a controversial book on her visit *Eastern Life, Past and Present* in which she took a culturally relativistic position in her analysis of Eastern religions. (47) This, and her collaborative work with Henry Atkinson, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* in 1851 (48) led to the final break with her brother James over her rejection of Unitarian theology.

As we have seen, Harriet's relationship with Henry Atkinson has been a subject of much interest to her biographers. Some have seen him as a dilettante, others have thought him 'a bore of the first quality' (49) and yet others, as an object of Harriet's repressed sexuality. Harriet, herself, tends to explain their relationship in terms of the complementary

nature of their ideas on philosophy and religion. She is also careful to defend herself from accusations of being overly influenced by him. In the *Autobiography* she refers to the 'painful social consequences' and criticism which followed the publication of the 'Atkinson Letters': and introduces the reproduction of a letter she had sent to Atkinson, as follows:

I give it [the letter] here that it may be seen how my passage from theology to a more effectual philosophy was, in its early stages, entirely independent of Mr. Atkinson's influence...I was, as Mr. Atkinson said, out of the old ways; and he was about to show me the shortest way round the corner.

(Martineau, *Op cit.*, 2, p. 281)

Significantly, she refers to Atkinson as a comrade, and portrays their joint pursuit of the 'truth' as inevitably coming into the public domain. They were, she wrote, 'bound to render our homage openly and devoutly'. Further, 'having found, as my friend said, a spring in the desert, should we see the multitude wandering in desolation, and not show them our refreshment?' (50) While these passages refer to the manner in which Harriet and Atkinson made public their intellectual discussions through publication of their correspondence, the language she uses is curiously intimate.

It is evident that Harriet enjoyed Atkinson's company and spent some time with him. For example, she writes briefly about one of their social encounters thus: 'To put it [the imminent completion of the *History*] out of my mind, I went for a long walk after breakfast with Mr. Atkinson to Primrose Hill (where I had never been before) and Regent's park'. (51) Perhaps she was even a little flattered by the attentions of a much younger

and, by all accounts, rather handsome man. However, it is my view that his attraction for her was that they were thinking along the same rather obscure (and somewhat shocking for those times) lines on the linkages between religion and philosophy, and belief and non-belief. In modern parlance, they shared the same discourse and were in pursuit of the same truths.

Harriet, also, during the 1950s, became a regular editorial writer and journalist for the Daily News and from 1852 onwards as we have seen, earned the reputation not only for being a fine journalist with an ability to write coherently on a wide range of topics but also as a highly influential campaigner and reformer, not afraid to tackle the most contentious issues of mid-Victorian society and culture. In 1855, predictably, in view of the enormous workload she had undertaken, her health once more gave way.

She wrote the noted Autobiography at breakneck speed in three months thinking that she would die at any moment. In fact, she lived for another twenty years, the first ten years of which still continued to be immensely productive. She became lead writer of the Daily News, producing as many as six leaders each week and totalling 1,642 articles in all. ⁽⁵²⁾ She also wrote numerous pieces for the Westminster, Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews and the popular journals of the day such as Charles Dickens' Household Words. ⁽⁵³⁾ She died at the age of seventy four, and her Autobiography was published posthumously, appearing alongside the numerous obituaries that simultaneously marked her death and re-visited her life.

Harriet Martineau's achievements in adulthood were determined, it seems to me, by three major influences on her early life. First, her general ill-health and later increasing deafness had a profound impact on her. They cast a huge shadow over her childhood causing each task to take on gigantic proportions, and also left her with an extremely low self-image and self-regard which, if the Autobiography is to be believed, lasted for the remainder of her life. She was, understandably therefore, particularly grateful to those (men?) who paid her some attention and this insecurity may have encouraged her tendency towards excessive admiration.

Moreover, the fact that she placed most of the blame for her childhood unhappiness on her mother meant that, psychologically, she was able to distance herself from the world of women. Thus, whilst in Harriet's account of her early years, her mother seems to predominate in all areas of Harriet's life, when it comes to discussing intellectual matters or her own writing, Mrs. Martineau disappears. Significantly, Harriet is most emphatic that she was first encouraged to write by her oldest brother, Richard, and by James - her mother is nowhere to be seen! However, both this rejection of the culture of women, and the fact that her disability debarred her from taking up other forms of employment thought appropriate to her sex and rank, created the context in which Harriet was able to move out of her conventional domestic role and into the public sphere.

Second, Harriet was crucially affected by the bourgeois individualism of her middle-class, provincial origins and her Unitarian upbringing. This not only influenced the issues that she chose to write about and campaign for, and the degree of energy, vitality and commitment that she brought to

her work. The manner in which she mounted her arguments - usually with high moral fervour and an air of certainty that what she was saying was right - was also not a little influenced and shaped by her earlier Unitarian theological training. As Sanders indicates, Harriet seemed to have an 'unremitting conviction that she was right on every issue, which lends some of her letters a tone of arrogance or complacency'. (54)

Of similar importance, particularly for her choice of career, was the emphasis, at home, on equality between men and women. As a consequence, she had the confidence and ambition both to pursue a literary career and to enter nineteenth-century Radical political debate. But her experience of being a woman and her developing interest in explanations for women's subordination, though she did not describe it as such, set her apart from male political peers. Further, because of the strict patriarchal division between public and private spheres, she was unable to enter either politics or the professions, the chosen occupational destination of many of her male contemporaries - though, as Swindells points out, the formation of professions was evolving throughout this period, for women as well as for men. (55)

Harriet's solution was to pursue a political career with her pen, by writing the *Illustrations* which provided a populist reworking of new economic formations. She continued this political project in further volumes on history, education and sociology. She also travelled but her accounts tended to be analyses of political systems rather than conventional travel books. Even her attempts at fiction, such as *Deerbrook* and *The Hour and the Man*, were thinly disguised political narratives.

Additionally, her Autobiography was written to extend and explain some of the political and philosophical themes of her earlier writing though she was sufficiently skilled a writer for it to also be regarded as an uninhibited commentary on the times in which she lived.

Finally, when she was at the height of political maturity, she took up journalism, at which she excelled - though curiously, at this time she began to vanish from the public eye, probably because most of her articles were unsigned. This increased anonymity freed her to become more assertive as a writer, for example, on sexual matters or divorce reform, and enabled her to broaden the range of topics she could properly address.

In fact, Harriet's writing on women in books, journals and newspapers, represents but a small part of the totality of her work. For example, of the numerous leaders she wrote for the Daily News, only sixty-four were on topics related specifically to women. However, because her overall output was so large, her writing on women represents a major contribution to the nineteenth century corpus of feminist work, providing one of the links between the feminist ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and the main nineteenth century women's movement. Harriet shared many of the views on women of the former, as we have seen, yet often seemed far in advance of the latter.

Her earliest efforts on women were written strictly within the bourgeois individualistic tradition of classic liberalism: thus, equality of access, for example, in education, was a major theme. However, her later work in the Edinburgh Review and the Daily News was more concerned with the choice between economic, legal and political strategies for the advancement of

women. Increasingly, as we have seen, her analysis developed a more material base as she argued for the necessity for paid female employment and equal pay, not only for the needs of a rapidly expanding industrial economy but in order that women could achieve economic independence. She regarded marriage as an economic rather than divine arrangement, and noted the patriarchal nature of the divorce laws. Given the age in which she was writing, she was also considerably in advance of her contemporaries in her criticism of Victorian notions of sexuality. In challenging the Contagious Diseases Acts when in her early sixties, for example, she rejected, outright, Victorian assumptions about the unremitting nature of male sexuality.

Harriet was deeply contradictory in her support, simultaneously, for women's 'natural' place in the home and women's rights to employment, as some of her biographers have pointed out. Yet, at the time she was writing, in the early and mid nineteenth century, it was inconceivable of her to think of home as anything other than where most women would expect to be. However, Harriet was also deeply concerned about achieving rights to employment for those women who chose to work outside the home and for those who had no choice - who had to work out of economic necessity. There is no doubt that she displayed many features of classic liberal feminism, yet she was also sufficiently politicised to recognise the economic and patriarchal origins of nineteenth century women's subordination.

In my view, then, while Harriet Martineau's 'life' as depicted in the Autobiography and elsewhere, is of considerable interest, it is her writing and in her roles as feminist theorist and activist, that she has most to

offer to us today. She demands recognition as an important nineteenth-century figure and acknowledgement for maintaining a feminist presence during the first half of the nineteenth century. Additionally, her Daily News leaders on women, fragments of which are included earlier in this thesis, deserve publication and appreciation from a new, twentieth-century audience.

Having thus presented *my* version of her life, I have raised, implicitly, a number of theoretical issues. To date, in this thesis, I have surveyed Harriet Martineau's own work and that of her commentators. At this point, in offering my own version of her work, I write from a position of a feminist working in England in the late 1980s and early 1990s, who has also engaged with marxist critical methodology. This has inevitably meant that the theoretical encounters in this thesis have been complex, yet inescapable. Further, Harriet Martineau has proved a challenge to some of the marxist feminist conceptual frameworks that I initially brought to bear on her life and work.

In the early stages of this study, I believed, as I argue in chapter 1, that the purpose of macro-theories such as marxist feminism is to cast theory widely in order to explain the broad turn of events; for example, the relationship between production and reproduction, or the formation of gendered class groupings. In the main, however, they seemed less helpful in identifying the significance of *individual* woman's action in relation to the broader movements of history. This study, hence, seemed far more

congenial to debates which emerged from the more individualistic approaches of liberal and radical feminism.

The treatment of Harriet Martineau for this thesis, therefore, has been of necessity, multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and not necessarily fitting into theoretical orthodoxies, marxist feminist or otherwise. On one hand, it is an investigation of Harriet Martineau as a *subject* of history and scholarship, drawing on her own writing to evaluate her intellectual contribution. Simultaneously, it treats her as an *object* of texts, as perceived by herself in her autobiography, and as depicted by commentators and biographers. As a subject of history, Harriet Martineau emerges as an active creator of ideas, a role model for women and a campaigner for politically advanced causes. At the same time, the evaluation of her work by her contemporaries, biographers and historians, and the variety of designations awarded to her - crypto-feminist, masculinised bluestocking, nineteenth century intellectual, 'foremother' of sociology and economics - renders her a complex object of interpretation.

What I have done in the opening chapters of this thesis, then, is to present the case of Harriet Martineau as both unique and generalisable. It is unique in its concentration on the life and work of an individual woman, and is generalisable in its application to issues within textuality, biography and history. In so doing, this study seeks the answers to several questions. Why has Harriet Martineau been recognised as significant by feminists in contrast to her relative neglect by mainstream scholars? How does the perspective adopted in this thesis - that of a feminist researcher in the late 1980s and early 1990s - differ from others

who have considered Harriet Martineau's work? And finally, what implications do the previous questions have for feminist and other debates about significance and the creation of a history of women?

NOTES

1. Webb R. K., (1959), *A Handlist of Contributions to the Daily News by Harriet Martineau*, unpublished, Colindale, London, British Library.
2. Saussure F., (1974), *Course in General Linguistics*, London, Fontana/Collins.
3. Gross J., (1983), 'Victorian Virago', *The Spectator*, 16 April; Dick K., (1983), 'Daunting memories of a harridan of virtue', *The Times*, 9 July; Stanley J., (1983), 'Nineteenth-century economist', *Morning Star*, 10 May; Cadogan M., (1983), 'Victorian fighter for women's rights', *Birmingham Post*, 7 April.
4. Unattributed, (1876), *English Woman's Review*, 39, 15 July, p. 289.
5. Coghill H. (ed.), (1899), *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant*, London, printed privately, p. 263.
6. Martineau H., (1877), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 2 volumes, London, Smith, Elder & Co.
7. Martineau J., (1884), 'The early days of Harriet Martineau', *Daily News*, 30 December.
8. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, p. 29.
9. Sanders V., (1990), 'Introduction', in Sanders V., (ed.), *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. ix.
10. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, p. 69.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
12. Watts R., (1989), 'Knowledge is Power - Unitarians, gender and education in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Gender and Education*, 1, 1, pp. 35-50.
13. The list of women claimed by Ray Strachey 'to have set on foot the Women's Movement' is almost exclusively composed of women with Unitarian connections. Strachey R., (1928), *The Cause: a Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, 1979 edn., London, Virago Press, p. 18.
14. Holt R. V., (1938), *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, 1958 edn., London, The Lindsey Press, p. 345.
15. Cross F. L., (ed.), (1957), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 1390.
16. Halevy E., (1924), *History of the English People in 1815*, 3, London, Pelican, p. 27.

17. Webb, op cit., p. 66.
18. Watts, op cit., p. 26
19. Martineau H., (1876) 'Obituary', Daily News, 29 June, p. 2.
20. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, written in 1690, rejected the notion of innate ideas in favour of the demonstration that 'all knowledge is founded on and ultimately derives itself from sense...or sensation'. He emphasised that understanding, discrimination, judgement and other like qualities were not innate but could be learnt through appropriate educative experiences. David Hartley's Observations on Man, written in 1749, proposed that the association of ideas could explain the existence of most mental phenomena. Popularised by Priestley, Hartley sought to explain human thought in terms of the interdependence of intellectual, physical and moral experience. Education in all three was thus necessary to create the existence of good men and women and to instil a love of God. As a consequence, belief in the importance of material benefits, such as education, became a major concern of Unitarians. Cross, op cit.
21. Webb, op cit., pp. 77-88.
22. See, for example, Taylor B., (1983), Eve and the New Jerusalem, London, Virago Press.
23. Letter from Harriet Martineau to Elizabeth Barrett, postmarked August 9, 1844, Wellesley, referred to in Webb, op cit., pp 16-17.
24. Harriet Martineau's earliest articles on women were: (1822), 'Female Writers of Practical Divinity', Monthly Repository, 17, pp. 593-596 & 746-750 and (1823), 'On Female Education', Monthly Repository, 18, pp. 77-81.
25. Martineau, (1877), op cit., 1, pp. 124-134.
26. Ibid., p. 141.
27. Harriet Martineau produced three books on religious issues during this period: (1826), Addresses, with Prayers and Original Hymns, Norwich, Rowland Hunter.; (1830), Traditions of Palestine, London, Orme Brown & Green; (1831), The Essential Faith of the Universal Church, Unitarian Society.
28. She also wrote three moral tales book during this period: (1827), Principle and Practice: the Orphan Family, London, Houlston & Son; (1828), Mary Campbell, or the Affectionate Granddaughter, London, Houlston & Son; and (1929), The Turn Out: a Tale, London, Houlston & Son.
29. Her first children's book, published in 1831, was entitled Five Years of Youth, or Sense and Sentiment, London, Harvey & Darton.
30. Published in 1832 by the Unitarian Association, the three essays were devoted to presenting the case for Unitarianism to other religious groups: The Essential Faith of the Universal Church - Deduced from Sacred Records, The Faith as Unfolded by Many Prophets: an essay addressed to the disciples

of Mohammed, and Providence as Manifested Through Israel: an essay addressed to the Jews.

31. Mineka F. E., (1944), *The Dissidence of Dissent: the Monthly Repository 1806-1838*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

32. The Illustrations are discussed in some detail in the political economy section of chapter 2.

33. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 1, pp. 271-297.

34. David D., (1987), *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press.

35. Nevill J. Cranstoun, (1943), *Harriet Martineau*, London, Frederick Miller Ltd., p. 70.

36. Martineau, (1877), *op cit.*, 2, p. 266.

37. Chapman M. Weston, (1877), *Memorials*, London, Smith, Elder & Co.

38. Rendall J., (1985), *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, p. 323.

39. *Ibid.*

40. See Purvis J., (1985), 'A feminist perspective on the history of women's education', in Purvis J. (ed.), *The Education of Girls and Women*, Leicester, History of Education Society, pp. 1-12. I use Purvis's broader definition of feminism here. In a survey of a wide range of feminist historical studies, she found two principal elements: a recognition of the existence of unequal power relationships between the sexes and a notion of engaging in some form of action which will help overcome sexual inequality.

Rendall's broader description for what she terms 'modern feminism' is useful but might possibly exclude women such as Harriet Martineau. She suggests that modern feminism was reflected in 'the way in which women came, in the period from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, to associate together, perhaps at first for different reasons, and then to recognise and to assert their common interests as women'.

Rendall, (1985), *op cit.*, p. 1

41. Taylor, *op cit.*

42. Harriet Martineau's three books arising out of her travels in the United States were: (1837), *Society in America*, 3 vols, London, Saunders & Otley; (1838), *How to Observe*, London, Charles Knight; (1838), *Retrospect of Western Travel*, London, Saunders & Otley.

43. Woodham-Smith C., (1956), 'They Stayed in Bed', *The Listener*, 16 February, pp. 245-6.

44. Martineau H., (1838-40), *The Guide to Service*, London, Charles Knight. Issues were devoted, for example, to *The Lady's Maid* and *The Maid of All-Work* (1838), *The Housemaid* (1839) and *The Dressmaker and The Milliner* (1840): (1841), *The Hour and the Man*: (1841), *The Playfellow*: the series comprised *Settlers at Home*, *The Prince and the Peasant*, *Feats on the Fiord* and *The Crofton Boys*: and (1844), *Life in the Sickroom*, London, Edward Moxon.

45. Showalter E., (1978), *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, London, Virago Press.

46. Harriet Martineau published works on a wide range of topics during her period in Ambleside. These include: (1845), *Letters on Mesmerism*, London, Edward Moxon; (1849), *History of England During the Thirty Years Peace*, London, Charles Knight; (1849), *Household Education*, London, Edward Moxon; (1861), *Our Farm of Two Acres*, London, Bradbury & Evans; (1851), *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, London, John Chapman; (1857), *British Rule in India*, London, Smith, Elder & Co.

47. Martineau H., (1848), *Eastern Life, Past and Present*, 3 volumes, London, Edward Moxon.

48. Martineau, (1851), *op cit.*

49. Wheatley V., (1957), *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau*, London, Secker & Warburg, p. 296

50. Martineau, (1877) *op cit.*, 2, p. 344.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

52. Chapman, *op cit.*

53. A section was devoted to Harriet Martineau's journalism in chapter 2.

54. Sanders V., *op cit.*, p. xii.

55. Swindells J., (1985), *Victorian Writing and Working Women*, London, Polity Press

CHAPTER 5

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP IN BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY:

PLACING HARRIET MARTINEAU

I shall now return to the theoretical considerations of placing of Harriet Martineau within feminist scholarship which I raised in chapter 1. In other words, having *surveyed* Harriet Martineau's life (in chapter 4) and work (in chapter 2), and the range of positions taken up by her commentators (in chapter 3), most of this chapter is devoted to a self-conscious *evaluation* of, or *reflection* on, what I have found and what relevance this might have for current debates within feminism. How, for example, can we understand and explain the different perspectives of the work of feminist (and other) scholars of Harriet Martineau (including my own study for this thesis). Why were certain approaches taken and not others? And what impact did these have on scholars' ultimate summation of Harriet Martineau's achievements? Also, since many of Harriet Martineau's commentators were biographers - though a number of commentaries on her achievements emerged from histories of the period (many focusing on women) - there is clearly a need for some clarification of the difference between the two genres. This chapter, therefore, first addresses some of the debates which have illuminated feminist scholarship, about the nature of history and its relationship with the expanding genres of biography and autobiography, and then considers Harriet Martineau's place within that scholarship.

History, Biography and Autobiography

Debates of interest to feminists concerning the writing of history began with the work of Leopold Von Ranke (1795-1886), professor of Berlin from 1825. Ranke laid the foundation for much modern historical research in advocating archival research as a means of providing an *accurate narrative* of the past. ⁽¹⁾ Most nineteenth-century scholars also thought they were charting the inevitable progress of western civilisation; however, historians living in the twentieth century identified different challenges. They lived in the shadows of Marx, Freud and Einstein, each of whom provided a new perspective on the world: and they also experienced, sometimes at first hand, wars and social upheavals on a global scale. As a consequence, concepts such as 'progress', 'continuity', and 'inevitability' proved problematic in the twentieth-century context. Further, whilst the main concern of nineteenth-century historians had been with the documentation of diplomatic and constitutional affairs, this was replaced in the twentieth century by a multiplicity of sub-histories to address the wider concerns of contemporary society. Economic, social, intellectual, demographic, family, black and women's history all served to illuminate areas of public interest and anxiety. ⁽²⁾

At the same time, historians themselves, male for the most part, began to reconsider their roles as creators of knowledge. Challenges were made to Ranke's 'objectivism' as historians began to reconstruct themselves as subjective interpreters of the past at the behest of the present. Thus, R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943) contended that understanding the past in a properly historical way requires on the part of the historian 'a re-

enactment of past experience' or a 'rethinking of past thought'. For Collingwood, all history is properly the history of thought, and involves the power of the imagination. ⁽³⁾ On the other hand, Charles Beard (1874-1948), husband of the eminent feminist historian Mary Beard, wrote history in order to illuminate the present. He expressed doubt about whether historical enquiry could ever provide an unpolluted account of the past and did much to heighten the methodological self-consciousness of the historical profession in the United States. He also argued for the importance of *values* to the historian. He posited that historians, when they come to study the past, bring to their enquiry certain standards of value which they impose in giving their accounts. ⁽⁴⁾

If, then, historians are not factual story-tellers or independent purveyors of the truth, what are they? E.H. Carr, writing in 1961, argued that the task of historians is to represent the perspective of their generation:

The historian, then, is an individual human being. Like other individuals, he is also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past.

(Carr E. H., (1961), *What is History?*, 1987 edn., Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp. 35 & 37)

Hill elaborated on Carr's theme to provide some indication of why a multiplicity of histories developed in the second half of the twentieth century:

History has to be rewritten in every generation, because although the past does not change the present does; each generation asks new

questions of the past, and finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experience of its predecessors.

(Hill C., (1975), *The World Turned Upside Down*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 15)

Historians may indeed, then, be ordinary people with partial understandings of earlier generations or eras? If this is so, what particular qualities separate them from non-historians? E. P. Thompson argued that empirical enquiry and the utilisation of a distinct historical logic must be regarded as significant specialisms of the historian. He emphasised that historical evidence is of crucial importance, yet it has no meaning of itself; it needs to be scrutinised by *minds held in what he called a mode of 'attentive disbelief'*. Further, there is a distinctive logic appropriate to the scrutiny of historical evidence which is different from the logic used in science. Accordingly, historians need different ways of examining data from those employed in scientific experiments or in laboratories and also employ different forms of logic from philosophers. (5)

These developments, among mainstream historians, of ideas about the historian's task, have considerable implications for feminist scholars. As we have seen, much conventional historical practice has turned on recording the facts of a given situation. Responses to complaints about the absence of women have been that women were simply not present, not important enough or not doing anything of major significance. However, the work of some of the historians quoted above indicates a way out of that particular *impasse*. Collingwood is helpful to feminists' understanding of the existence of male-defined knowledge by arguing that historians, however 'scientific' they think themselves, are not at all objective in their writing of

history. For him, history is about entering the thought processes of historical actors and about empathy, rather than merely a narrative of factual occurrences. Beard goes further to discuss the inevitable incompleteness and selectivity of historiography whilst Thompson restates the importance of historical evidence, nonetheless maintaining that checks need to be developed to avoid distortion and misinterpretation. Thus, Harriet Martineau's treatment by mainstream historians, if these ideas are taken up, might be as much to do with their inability to empathise with the female experience, with their unconscious choices about what topics merit investigation or with their partial interpretation of data, as with deliberate attempts to retain patriarchal domination of academic processes.

If history is so complex, what can be said about its relationship to biography and autobiography? The conventional definition of biography, as exemplified by Anderson in 1984, is that of 'the history of a particular human life'. ⁽⁶⁾ Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of autobiography is 'the writing of one's own history; the story of one's life written by himself'. ⁽⁷⁾ At the other end of the spectrum, Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) the American poet and essayist, argued for biography as embracing all forms of history: 'All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history, only biography'. ⁽⁸⁾

Biography has also variously been claimed as gossip (by John Aubrey ⁽⁹⁾), a look through keyholes (by Samuel Johnson ⁽¹⁰⁾), a noble and uplifting enterprise (by Samuel Taylor Coleridge ⁽¹¹⁾), the selective illumination of a life (by Lytton Strachey ⁽¹²⁾), and as art (by Virginia Woolf ⁽¹³⁾). Pimlott, a modern political biographer, extends Woolf's metaphor of

biographer as artist by comparing biography to painting; both have the aim of building an impression that is both recognisable and revealing. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Interestingly, the term 'autobiography' is comparatively new; it was first used in the *Quarterly Review* in 1809 by the poet, Robert Southey, who predicted an 'epidemical rage for auto-biography'. ⁽¹⁵⁾ If the volumes on popular bookstall shelves count as evidence, the 'rage' for autobiography has certainly extended to the late twentieth century!

Modern discussion about biography (and autobiography) has tended to blur the boundaries between genres. Clifford ⁽¹⁶⁾, for example, asks the questions: what is a biographer - a superior journalist or an artist? Is the writing of a life a narrow branch of history or a form of literature - or an amalgam of art and science. At various times, he claims, there has been intense interest in the writing of lives but not until recently has there been a focus on the complex psychological and artistic problems in recreating a character.

Pushing the boundaries even further, Spengemann argues for the expansion of what should be accepted as autobiography; accordingly, a writer's collected works might be thought of as autobiography as also might letters, diaries, travel journals, autobiographical fiction and so on. Thus, autobiography need require only 'some evidence that the writer's self is either the primary subject or the principal object of verbal action'. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Feminist biographers and autobiographers have been equally concerned with the diffuse qualities of the genres, though Heilbrun ⁽¹⁸⁾ claims that whilst women's biography and autobiography are increasingly popular, there

is still little sense of what they should look like. Where should they begin, she asks: birth, Freudian family romance, oedipal configuration, relationship with mother /father, becoming or failing to become a sex object; looks; life if married or unmarried; women friends in middle or old age etc.? It is interesting to compare this suggested framework with those adopted for Harriet Martineau's biographies, including my own for chapter 4. Certainly, many of them addressed the areas listed by Heilbrun, whether or not they were written by feminist authors.

Also, when biographers come to write the life of a woman (as in the case of Hugo Young's recent biography of Margaret Thatcher), they have to struggle with the inevitable conflict between the destiny of being unambiguously a woman and the woman's palpable desire to be something else. Young exemplifies this difficulty in the following passage on Margaret Thatcher's 'womanly' concern for 'her trusty lieutenants':

She was a woman, with a woman's concern for those around her and a most assiduous attention to the details of their lives: whether they missed a meal, whether their wives had recovered from flu, whether their children had passed exams. Throughout her time as prime minister she took care to establish the strongest bond with each cohort of private secretaries and other officials, as they came forward into her personal service. The contrast was much to be remarked between this attractive trait and the inability she constantly manifested to register the same quality of caring for the nation at large'

(Young H., (1990), *One of Us*, London, Pan Books, p. 159)

Thus, as we see from the above quote and also from writers on Harriet Martineau, many biographers of women have found it difficult to

disassociate their subjects from 'womanliness' in their attempts to create an 'actor' as well as a 'life'.

There is also the problem of language, particularly in autobiography. Women have found it difficult to find a language or form of expression which does not lay themselves open to accusations of unwomanliness, since the act of writing defies the conventions and stereotypes of womanhood (eg selflessness, modesty, passivity). Thus, the autobiographical writing of Caroline Norton was criticised for 'stridency' and that of Harriet Martineau, as we have seen, for 'egotism'. According to Sanders ⁽¹⁹⁾, to avoid this criticism nineteenth-century women biographers frequently claimed that they were writing for unselfish reasons; not for themselves but for other women or for the common good or, in the case of Harriet Martineau, to tell the truth about her life and loss of faith. Women, as biographers and autobiographers, have thus been denied narratives and plots by which they can create their own texts and thereby take power over their own lives. Moreover, as Heilbrun claims, the maleness of language is problematic: 'How can women create stories of women's lives if they have only male language with which to do it...Through working within male discourse, we work ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written'. ⁽²⁰⁾

In exploring the specific genre of women's autobiographical writing, Sanders echoes some of the previous discussion about history as well as focusing on issues of language; in particular she raises questions about the (in-) completeness of accounts. She admits that the most important interests she has in reading an autobiography are sub-textual ie what is

implicit. For example, she wants to know what each biographer stresses or leaves out; how her own life has been shaped, artistically; the consequent evasiveness of her own portraiture, the existence of an undeciphered subtext; and what to accept at face value and how much to read between the lines. (21)

In the case of Harriet Martineau's autobiography as well as some of her other writings such as *Household Education* which clearly draw on her own childhood experiences, the impression gained is of an author wholly in charge of her account. She appears, deliberately and skilfully, to create a picture of her life that provides a platform for her views, yet also provides just enough interesting detail and anecdote to keep the reader gripped.

It is hoped that this relatively brief discussion on the nature and inter-relationship, currently hotly contested, between history, biography and autobiography has shown both what is unique to each and also, more importantly, what they have in common in the post-positivist era of boundary dissolution.

Feminist Perspectives

Whether they label themselves historians or biographers, it is clear that feminist scholars of both genres have interpreted their research objectives in quite different ways. Some have seen their principal tasks as researching individual women and evaluating the contributions of women to history; others have viewed their main priorities as exploring women's

distinctive experiences and documenting their continued subordination; yet others have seen their task as more complex, considering the ideological construction and historical specificity of femininity, excavating the lives of hitherto invisible working class and/or black women or exploring the contribution of women to 'progressive' movements such as Chartism. Significantly, most have displayed some interest in women's rights and feminist campaigns.

For the purposes of more detailed discussion, the approaches to women's lives which derive from projects of feminist scholarship as described above, may be grouped into categories as I indicate below. It is important to emphasise, however, that these categories have been created in order to deconstruct the variety of feminist projects. They should not be seen as necessarily discrete, and individual studies (such as my own) may be appropriately located in one or more of them. The categories of projects within feminist scholarship (22) may be described as follows:

- * women worthies - 'the good and the great'.
- * women's contributions to political movements.
- * women in social and other histories.
- * women's rights and feminist movements.
- * separate spheres - women-centred scholarship.
- * intersections of class and gender
- * woman as subject of text

Many early feminist scholars began by chronicling famous or exceptional women; that is, women worthies. Doris Mary Stenton's *The English Woman in*

History ⁽²³⁾ relies on this approach as does Florence Fenwick Miller's biography of Harriet Martineau. ⁽²⁴⁾ Surveys of eminent women such as that carried out by Sutton Castle ⁽²⁵⁾ were also part of this tradition. It was the predominant tradition at the end of the nineteenth century during the 'first-wave' women's movement, because, as Lewis ⁽²⁶⁾ points out, it arose from women's desire for a better self-image and a greater sense of self-worth. However, important though it may be to analyse the personal circumstances and external pressures which led to such women taking the centre stage, this approach may be criticised for neither describing the experiences of the mass of women, nor portraying the full complexity of society at any given stage in its development. ⁽²⁷⁾

The approach which prioritises women's contributions to political movements, on the other hand, has conceptualised women's history in terms of the part women have played in 'male-defined' movements in society. So, studies have been made of the parts women took, for instance, in the Chartist Movement ⁽²⁸⁾ or in the French Revolution ⁽²⁹⁾ and these have gone some way to restoring the historical balance. Harriet Martineau's place might seem less strong here since she played only a minor part in supporting the Chartists and was an advocate of Utilitarianism, yet not among its foremost proponents. Nonetheless, her unrelenting support for the Abolitionists cause in North America as well as her general support for reform (including the extension of rights to women) secure her presence here.

Reservations, however, have been expressed about the acceptance, within this strand of feminist scholarship, of traditional (or male) definitions

of historical significance as subject matter. Thus, little attempt is made to reconceptualise history and the analysis of women's role only appears to be taken up when women are perceived as having had an impact on recognised political and reform movements. (30) This, Smith Rosenberg claims, means that scholars adopting this approach still continue to define the experiences of women-as-women as marginal to mainstream academic thought.

(31)

There has also been an increase of women in social and other histories, noticeable particularly, in the strong cross fertilisation of ideas between women's history and other recently emerging fields of study such as family and labour history. As we have seen, social history was particularly popular with women scholars and Harriet Martineau, herself, wrote a very competent history within this genre.

Further, social history has contributed to women's scholarship in several ways; first, it provides alternative methodologies for the study of women's lives, drawn from sociology, demography and ethnography; second, it conceptualises as worthy of study, phenomena hitherto unrecognised, such as family relationships, fertility and sexuality; and third, it challenges the narrative line of political history by considering a wide range of human experience including that of women. It thus legitimises focus on groups traditionally excluded from mainstream consideration. Once again, Harriet Martineau's contributions are evident: first, in her utilisation of sociological methods to evaluate the structure of democracy in the United States in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century and in her particular focus on the condition of women and slaves; and second, in her work on

political economy and particularly her portrayal of mid-nineteenth century political and cultural concerns through her Daily News journalism.

Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, ⁽³²⁾ may be regarded as a prototype of modern social history since it charts the growth of working class consciousness in Britain, identifying class as a 'historical phenomeneon', something which happens in human relations. Class happens, Thompson claims, 'when some men (*sic*), as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. ⁽³³⁾ The work was commended by Marwick for 'bringing into proper perspective the aspirations and conscious efforts of working people, too often treated by other historians as an inert and faceless mass, passive to the central forces in history'. ⁽³⁴⁾ Thus, Thompson's historical treatment of class deals both with experience of being a member of the working class and with working-class consciousness.

The obvious parallels between the emergence of class as a historically legitimate category, and that of gender, have proved compelling for feminists, even though Thompson failed to follow them through. Joan Wallach Scott criticises Thompson for assuming that male and female class interests are identical and for being predominantly about men:

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, the male designation of general concepts is literalized in the persons of the political actors who are described in strikingly detailed (and easily visualised) images. The book is crowded with scenes of men busily working, meeting, writing, talking, marching, breaking machines, going to prison, bravely standing up to the police, magistrates and prime

ministers. This is preeminently a story about men, and class is, in its origin and its expression. constructed as a masculine identity, even when not all the actors are male.

(Wallach Scott J., (1988), *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 72)

But, as we have seen, Davidoff and Hall (35) have been able to incorporate a gender and class analysis in their study of the English middle class, as has Kean in her recent portrayal (36) of the ways in which socialists and feminist and socialist teacher trade unionists sought to bring pressure to change state education in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

So, whilst social history has freed historians to write about women - and Harriet Martineau has a place within this approach both as an author and as a subject viz. participant member of an early Victorian intellectual elite - it is still orientated towards male concerns. Social history has also been criticised for limiting the potential of women's experience to transform the historical record, though studies of women's work have been undertaken which have provided important data for the analysis of family organisation and sex-segregation in the labour market. (37) Research on women's experience has thus enriched social history, yet women have not yet achieved centrality in social history's largely successful effort to challenge the dominance of political history. (38)

Another set of questions concerns women's oppression and its opposing forces - the struggle for women's rights. Who oppressed women and in what ways? How did they respond to such oppression? Such questions have yielded detailed accounts of economic, social and physical injustices, and

the means by which women have organised to struggle against them. (39)
Harriet Martineau's use of census figures to denote patterns of women's employment and her articles on the poor conditions of female seamstresses are two illuminating examples of this aspect of feminist scholarship. (40)

Yet, while inferior status, abuse and subordination have undoubtedly been the lot of many women, such enquiry can imply deficiency on the part of women to cope with their circumstances. It can also fail to identify positive ways in which women have functioned in history. Mary Beard, (41) for example, claims that the full contribution of women to the development of human culture cannot be found by treating them only as victims of oppression; and Harriet Martineau insisted, as we have seen, that women must take ultimate responsibility for improving the lot of their own sex.

The development of feminist consciousness and how women have resisted their oppression have been the main interest of the history of women's rights movements, especially that of electoral reform. (42) These themes provided the basis for much feminist scholarship notwithstanding differences of feminist perspective. Studies, however, have tended to be limited to the organisational and institutional characteristics of the movements and the personalities of their leaders and thus have diminished the part that others have played. Nonetheless, there have been important exceptions such as Barbara Taylor's study of Owenite women in *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, Liddington and Norris's sensitive and illuminating account of working-class women's participation in the English suffrage campaigns in *One Hand Tied Behind Us* and Denise Riley's more recent examination of the struggle for 'the Womanly Vote'. (43) In this work, Riley argues that the feminist

campaigns of the nineteenth century were of necessity, sectional. In order to succeed, the women's movement was obliged to detach itself from earlier radical campaigns:

The advancement of 'women' must always take its tone from the differing backgrounds out of which their candidacy is to be prised;...

Nineteenth-century women, supposedly, embodying the benevolent truth of the social, could only present themselves as potential electors by breaking out of the old massifications, and departing, for instance, from the radical 'associationism' of the 1830s which had sought universal manhood suffrage. At such moments the suffrage claim takes on the look of being the narrow advocacy of a group interest, an individualism-for-sex. It must insist on attention to 'women', and yet challenge what it takes to be inappropriate insistences on 'women' which spring from sexual conservatism.

(Riley D., (1988), *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, pp. 67-8)

Harriet Martineau has been frequently identified with campaigns relating to the 'Woman Question'; yet, until relatively recently, most attention has been paid to the fight for women's suffrage. As a consequence, whilst she was one of the signatories to John Stuart Mill's 1867 Women's Suffrage Bill, Harriet Martineau's main contributions to campaigns on behalf of women - for the repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, the reform of divorce legislation, and for the right of women to paid employment - have largely been underestimated.

Thus, accounts of of feminist campaigns, particularly concerning suffrage, have tended to be uni-dimensional, celebratory in tone and often poorly located in the culture and political climate from which they emerged. So, whilst examination of feminist movements has been regarded as a major area

of feminist scholarship, it has not been identified as its most important concern. (44)

Separate sphere - women-centred scholarship, in contrast, has focused on the rewriting of women's history as 'herstory' and on the development of a narrative of women's experience either alongside or entirely outside conventional disciplinary frameworks. The aim here is to legitimise as worthy of study, female experiences that have been ignored or rendered non-existent, and to insist on the female presence in the recording of history. One of the strands within this approach seeks to illuminate the structures of ordinary women's lives as well as those of notable women, in order to discover the extent of feminine or feminist consciousness underpinning female behaviour. Although she cannot be said to be 'ordinary', those of Harriet Martineau's commentators who sought to place emphasis on her repressed sexuality, her relationship with her mother and siblings, and her feelings about being a woman, are relevant here.

The central aspect of this strand is exclusive focus on female action, on the causal role played by women in history, and on the way gender has determined their lives.

Evidence consists of women's expressions, ideas and actions. Explanation and interpretation are framed within the terms of the female sphere; by examination of personal experience, familial and domestic structures, collective (female) reinterpretation of social definitions of woman's role, and networks of female friendship that provided emotional as well as physical sustenance.

(Wallach Scott J., (1983), 'Women in History: 2. The Modern Period', Past and Present, 101, November, p. 148)

The attempt to record past female experiences from a woman-centred point of view has already resulted in substantial reinterpretations of woman's role. As Vicinus wrote in 1977, it is now possible to write about areas previously unexplored.

Scholars of the Victorian period are expressing considerable discomfort with the old clichés about women. Earlier notions about female sexuality and prostitution have been substantially altered with increasing research and debate. The passivity, frigidity, and uselessness of the female model idealized during the Victorian era in etiquette books and some fiction has come under attack for its extreme simplicity.

(Vicinus M., (1977), 'Introduction', in Vicinus M., (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, Indiana University Press, p. xi)

Patricia Branca (45) shares the view of Vicinus when she challenges the popular stereotype of middle-class Victorian women as ornamental, idle and helpless by showing how the majority managed on restricted budgets and with few servants. Certainly, Harriet Martineau's youthful autodidacticism and her later energetic responses to family hardship are similarly illuminating counter-claims. Further, Branca found that middle-class Victorian women easily adapted to technological changes such as the introduction of the sewing machine and were not averse to using birth control as a means of providing for their own health and the well-being of their families. As we have seen, Harriet Martineau's demand to Rowland Hill to make arrangements for mail delivery to be speeded up between Ambleside and London shows that she, too, was not averse to using modernised information channels to upgrade her own working conditions.

The role of spinsterhood is another interesting area of exploration here. Consideration of the advantages for women of remaining single has already been addressed in this thesis and has revealed how positive Harriet Martineau and some of her contemporaries felt about spinsterhood. This offers an alternative perspective on Victorian spinsterhood and its negative stereotypes of poverty and oppression. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ Other studies within this approach have explored the motives behind the practice of birth control in the nineteenth century. In his classic study of the nineteenth century birthrate, Banks ⁽⁴⁷⁾ concludes that economic reasons were responsible for the increased use of contraception. But, both Branca and Scott Smith ⁽⁴⁸⁾ use gender as a conceptual spade to claim the existence of 'domestic feminism', whereby English and North American women were able to achieve greater personal autonomy over their fertility and within the home. Thus, some were able, like Harriet Martineau at Ambleside, to celebrate domesticity without being ensnared by it.

However, woman-centred scholarship is not without problems.

Reinterpretations, such as those by Branca and Scott Smith, place a premium on women as actors rather than victims, thus providing a tension between active and passive portrayals of women's behaviour. Awareness of the actor-victim dimension has resulted in some finely drawn analyses (for example, Smith-Rosenberg's study of hysteria ⁽⁴⁹⁾), but there are occasions, Lewis claims, when the balance is less even. She suggests, for instance, that Branca, in her enthusiasm to overthrow the passive female stereotype, neglects to make clear the very real constraints upon the behaviour of nineteenth century middle-class women. ⁽⁵⁰⁾ Once again, Harriet Martineau's retreat into illness at the age of 39 (in common with

her female contemporaries Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Florence Nightingale) provides some insight into the strategies to which some women had to resort, in order to be freed from 'womanly duties' to pursue their own chosen paths.

Another problem for this approach lies in its occasional failure to distinguish between *evaluating* women's behaviour and awarding a positive assessment to all that women have said or done. It might be argued, for instance, that this kind of feminist scholarship replaces men with women but does not reconceptualise the historical record. ⁽⁵¹⁾ Although women are substituted for men as the subjects of accounts, their story remains separate, with the use of different questions, categories of analysis and sources.

Many of the most recent developments in feminist theory have focused on the intersections of class and gender in feminist scholarship. These emerged as a challenge to the classic 'economist' marxist position of woman which stresses 'her simple subordination to the institutions of private property. Her biological status underpins both her weakness as a producer, in work relations and her importance as a possession in reproductive relations'. ⁽⁵²⁾ Acknowledging her debt to the work of Engels, Fourier, Bebel and de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchell identifies four structures which, when combined together, produce the 'complex unity' of women's historical position: production, reproduction, sexuality and the socialisation of children. Accordingly, the liberation of women can only be achieved when *all* four structures are transformed.

Other marxist and socialist feminists, such as Davidoff and Hall (53), take up Mitchell's themes to develop greater understanding about the impact of mass industrialisation on the gendered role of women in the home and in the workplace. In their important study of the English middle class from the end of the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Davidoff and Hall outline their approach:

While many facets of middle-class formation are explored, this is not a study of the relations between the middle class and other strata, an important but different story...Rather it argues for the centrality of the sexual division of labour within families for the development of capitalist enterprise. It also traces how new conceptions of sexual difference were built on existing traditions and maps the social and institutional effects of those beliefs.

(Davidoff L. & Hall C., (1987), *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, London, Hutchinson, p. 13)

Interestingly, scholars taking this perspective have differed in their evaluation of Harriet Martineau's life. Walters perceived Harriet Martineau's career in terms of 'a masculine choice, a masculine persona' as she set up the 'impassable divide between the personal and the impersonal, between - on the one hand - discipline, principle, duty, the rational mind; and on the other, passion'. (54) In contrast, whilst Davidoff and Hall agree with Walters about Harriet Martineau's feminism being grounded in the need for self-control and self discipline, they are more interested in her need to celebrate the more 'womanly' attribute of domesticity. Why, if her own experience of domestic life was so mixed they ask, did Harriet Martineau celebrate domestic life?

In *Household Education*, published in 1848, she argued that the most ignorant women she had known had also been the worst housekeepers...Martineau saw the artisan household as providing a good

model for the running of a household for there women had to necessarily had to be heavily involved themselves and could not leave the upbringing of the children and the management of the home to servants. The mother would take major responsibility for the children but the father would be involved when he came home in the evenings. The children would learn to help from the beginning and girls would learn domestic management the best possible way. Love was the right source of parental authority she thought, and combined this with advice on breastfeeding, on fresh air and exercise, and the importance of cleanliness.

(Ibid., pp. 186-7)

I suggest that this feminist approach has greater explanatory power than those mentioned earlier, in relating changes in the role of women historically to changes in class structure and the development of capitalism and industrialisation. My criticisms concern its audience. The complexity of the theory and the concepts used can be daunting for beginning scholars or for those unfamiliar with its sometimes obtuse terminology.

Rosalind Delmar, (55) is rather more concerned with historically changing definitions of woman as subject of text. In her criticism of the overstrict identification in texts, of feminism with women's social movements, Delmar maintains that feminists have not always held the same concept of 'woman' either at any one time or over time. Different alliances were entered into at different times. For example, before the twentieth-century women's movement, women had been thought of, by feminists and non-feminists alike, as a separate social group with needs and interests of their own:

This does not mean that only feminists treated 'woman' as a unified category, or that anyone who does so is a feminist. Nor is it to say that all feminists share or have shared the same concept of womanhood.

Although the suffrage movement effected a political shift away from exclusive considerations of women as sex to emphasize women as social group, the post suffrage movement...adopted a concept of woman based on the needs of reproduction and the social value of maternity.

(Delmar R., (1986), 'What is feminism?', in Mitchell J. & Oakley A., (eds.), *What is Feminism?*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p. 25)

In a similar vein, drawing on the work of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, feminists such as Denise Riley have drawn attention to the 'volatility' of the category of woman. According to Riley, the category of woman is historically and discursively constructed and is always dialectically related to other social categories, which themselves are continually changing. Women such as Harriet Martineau thus regarded themselves only sometimes as women: at other times they identified with class, ethnic, national or other interests. (56) Thus, in Harriet Martineau's case, her perception of 'woman' meant different things at different times of her life. In her earliest writing, she was concerned to construct woman as an *equal being* to man, socially, politically and educationally; later, she focused on the possibility of woman as *economically independent*; and towards the end of her life, she viewed woman more as being *self-contained*, that is, having responsibility for her own destiny. At other times her womanhood was subsumed as she identified herself more with Utilitarianism, Unitarianism, her particular middle-class origins, Victorian radicalism, people with handicaps, the intellectual elite etc.

Moreover, according to this view, the instability of 'woman' as a category has a historical foundation, and feminist scholarship provides the possibility for a systematic examination and struggle over, that instability. Thus, as we have seen, Harriet Martineau's positioning in

texts, written by herself and her biographers, has enabled us to see how much more influential is the author than the subject, in the creation of a 'life'; and in particular, the importance of the author's perspective on women, in the creation of a woman's life.

Post-structural theorists such as those mentioned above have been profoundly important to this feminist approach, and have, according to Wallach Scott, provided feminism with a 'powerful analytic tool'. (57) It is thus the task of the scholar to pursue knowledge - 'understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships, in this case of those between man and women' (58) - and to encourage questions about how hierarchies, such as those of gender, are constructed and legitimated historically. Processes rather than origins are emphasised, multiple rather than single causes, and rhetoric or discourse rather than ideology or consciousness.

If the meanings of concepts are taken to be unstable, open to contest and redefinition, then they require vigilant repetition, reassertion, and implementation by those who have endorsed one or another definition. Instead of attributing a transparent and shared meaning to cultural concepts, post-structuralists insist that meanings are not fixed in a culture's lexicon but are rather dynamic, always potentially in flux.

(Wallach Scott J., (1988), *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 5)

These somewhat complex approaches to understanding women's experience have sought to reveal the shared experiences, fragmentations and contradictions of women's position historically, by examining its dialectical relationship to other social formations and categories. They, thus, reject attempts to

describe and explain the chronological improvement of women's lot or to offer over-simplistic accounts of women's achievements or set backs. Therein lies both the weakness and the strength of this position. It can offer highly complex, and often somewhat esoteric, understandings rather than political solutions. To recast Marx's famous quotation, the intention might be seen sometimes as to understand the endless complexities of the world rather than to change it.

* * * * *

In this chapter I have explored some ideas of interest to feminist scholarship within history, biography and autobiography and how each relates with the other. Interestingly, while drawing on mainstream intellectual developments, feminists have constructed their own methodologies and theories to explain and challenge women's invisibility. Despite differences in perspective and approach - and it must be emphasised here that the categories outlined above overlap as scholars develop more complex perspectives on their work - most agree that merely replacing men with women is not enough. The establishment of a women's history should be more broadly based and 'demands a fundamental re-evaluation of the assumptions and methodology of traditional history and traditional thought.' (59)

Feminists have also begun to develop various conceptions of feminist and/or women's experience based on their differing analyses of the reasons for women's subordination historically. Thus, just as it is has become commonplace to differentiate between forms of feminism, it is likely that

we shall begin to identify specific kinds of feminist scholarship. This need not necessarily lead to fragmentation but to a multiplicity of discourses that represent a multiplicity of experiences. An added complexity is that the seemingly unproblematic category of 'woman' has been found to be extraordinarily elusive and complex. Clearly new questions need to be asked about how woman's consciousness as 'woman' interacts with her family, class or religious affiliations and what implication this had for feminist movements and understanding.

What is particularly interesting for this study is that it is possible to place Harriet Martineau and studies of her in all the areas of feminist scholarship outlined above. Perhaps her eclectic appeal is one of the causes of my early difficulty in adequately theorising about both her achievements and her place in women's history. Her wide range of intellectual pursuits, for which she was condemned as 'second-rate' by Webb has, I suggest, guaranteed Harriet Martineau a place in a wide range of feminist scholarship and endeavour.

Further, in reflecting on the shape my study of Harriet Martineau has taken for this thesis, it becomes evident that though it touches on many of the categories mentioned above, its very complexity and multi-dimensionality locates it most strongly within the discourse of 'woman as subject of text'.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

What, then, has this study to offer to feminist scholarship and to the understanding of the impact of feminism on the development of mainstream (or 'malestream') ideas. As we saw in the last chapter, this study appears most congenial to the category of feminist scholarship which emphasises the shifting nature of notions of womanhood and also, its dialectical relationship to other social formations such as class, family, religion etc. This study is also shaped by what may best be described as a material feminist analysis; that is, one which contends that all human action is the consequence of specific cultural, economic and social conditions and influences.

In deliberately aiming to reveal the complexities and diversity of such a study, the account that emerges aims also to avoid the unidimensionality of many earlier studies of Harriet Martineau which focused on her as a mediocre representative of an extraordinary age, auxiliary intellectual, feminist role model, warm human being, complex psychological subject and so on. She may well have been some, or even most of these things, yet most studies of her have tended to highlight one particular feature of her life or work.

Interestingly, throughout most of this thesis I refer to Harriet Martineau by her full name in a conscious attempt to award her the intellectual recognition which I believe she deserves. Only in the

biographical section (chapter 4) do I use her first name only, because here it seems more appropriate to the discussion of the more intimate parts of her life.

This deliberate assignation of Harriet Martineau in text is part of a conscious strategy which places Harriet Martineau as subject of text in addition to, and beyond that of, subject of biography. Hence, my aim has been to make a genuine contribution to feminist scholarship not only in terms of the fresh perspective I hope I have brought to a woman's life but also in the methods I have chosen to use. My intention in structuring the study of Harriet Martineau in this way has been to develop a more complex way of seeing - which avoids stereotypes, reductionism and uni-dimensionalism. It is important to stress here that perceptions of Harriet Martineau are dependent not only on the texts that she left behind but on the history of commentary about her. I therefore suggest that this study shows the crucial importance of secondary (as well as primary) sources in helping us to understand our responses to events and people in the past.

However, my study of Harriet Martineau and my reflections upon it are but one interpretation of Harriet Martineau's life and work. As such, as we have seen in chapter 3, it offers a different perspective to many of her biographers. Those writing in the nineteenth century, for example, reflected dominant nineteenth-century ideologies about women in their emphasis on her unmarried status. It was then common to view unmarried women as unfulfilled

and sexually repressed. Accordingly, women such as Harriet Martineau, who strayed into the male discourse of the public sphere, were deemed masculine and in Harriet Martineau's case, 'egotistical'.

By the early twentieth century, however, public sphere women were reconceptualised as unusual and eccentric rather than unnatural. Interest in eugenics generated heightened interest in appearance and mentality, and awareness of the new science of psychology led to speculation about Harriet Martineau's personality and her relationships with family and friends. Nonetheless, there were women writers during this period, such as Rivenburg ⁽¹⁾, who were able to take a rather more dispassionate view of women's work. They located women such as Harriet Martineau within mainstream developments in the history of ideas, rather than in the ghettos of historical eccentricity.

In the post World-War II period, there was a greater availability of historical sources which meant that biographers knew more about Harriet Martineau. This increase in evidence was counterbalanced, however, by entrenched views about the preferred qualities of women. At a time when women were being exhorted to go back to the home, Harriet Martineau's biographers appeared to subscribe to equally stereotyped convictions. Wheatley ⁽²⁾ was most concerned to establish her subject as warm and sensitive women, somewhat distanced from the nineteenth-century feminist movement. At the same time, Webb ⁽³⁾ could only regard his subject as a somewhat

inferior representative of an extraordinary historical era. Tellingly, he placed highest value on Harriet Martineau's writing style and the neatness of her manuscripts.

On the other hand, from her lifetime onwards, feminists consistently esteemed Harriet Martineau highly; as one of the catalogue of great* women of the nineteenth century and as an important early campaigner for feminist causes. As feminist ideas gained prominence, the trickle of feminist writing on Harriet Martineau early in the twentieth century became a steady stream in the 1980s. Moreover, feminist accounts of Harriet Martineau written from the 1970s onward displayed little interest in Harriet Martineau's appearance or womanliness. They were concerned, rather, to explore whether claims about Harriet Martineau's intellectual and feminist achievements could be defended, and what implications this had for extending knowledge about women

As I attempted to show in the last chapter, feminist writing on Harriet Martineau, however, also revealed differences of perspective *within* feminist scholarship. Liberal feminists ('4') aimed to restore Harriet Martineau to her rightful place as as writer, sociologist, economics educator or feminist activist: and radical feminists sought to explore those aspects of her writing which disclosed her gendered experiences, for example, in relation to repressed sexuality as an unmarried women, or as an unloved daughter. In the few instances where marxist feminist historians focused on Harriet Martineau, they tended to dismiss her as 'masculanised' or

representative of the bourgeois feminist tradition which valued individualism above collective effort.

However, Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes* and David's *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy* marked an important development within this approach. Davidoff and Hall ⁽⁵⁾ legitimised the study of women such as Harriet Martineau as part of the wider exploration of the historical relationship between gender and class; and David ⁽⁶⁾ showed convincingly how women like Harriet Martineau could be placed centre-stage, as organic intellectuals - in accounts of nineteenth-century class formation and class struggle.

Ultimately, then, this thesis should be seen as a political study with its origins in liberal and radical feminist projects - to restore women to their rightful place in society and to establish a history of women. Yet in many ways, my understanding of the condition of women, historically and currently, has made me more sympathetic to the theories and methodologies within marxist feminism. In particular, as I have already shown, I was able to draw on the work of Davidoff and Hall and David, as well as on Scott Wallach's utilisation of post-modernist theories in feminist discourse and her encouragement to undertake multi-dimensional approaches to the study of women. ⁽⁷⁾ .

Moreover, marxist feminist and other critical theories helped me understand my discomfort with producing a celebratory account of Harriet Martineau's life. They also provided an analytic framework

for exploring the apparent inconsistencies in Harriet Martineau's views, and for understanding her role as both 'saboteur' of, and 'collaborator' in, the patriarchal, bourgeois culture in which she flourished. (8)

As a consequence, I began to understand my own early hostility towards romanticising Harriet Martineau; whether or not she was a lovable person had been of little consequence to me. I was much more interested in the quality and impact of her work and about why she chose to take up certain issues and not others. As a feminist writing in the late twentieth century, a priority for me was the value of Harriet Martineau's life and her writing for women *today*; exploring her character beyond how this helps us understand present patriarchal forces, was of less interest.

Whilst I am aware that by attempting to clarify my own theoretical position for this thesis, I might lay myself open to added criticism, the part of the critical research tradition which locates research within the political domain necessitates that I do so. Moreover, self-critical candour is also important in making the crucial connections between this study and the broader critical framework of feminist scholarship.

In terms of the specific contribution of this thesis, two central themes emerge: biographers' differential assessment of Harriet Martineau's achievements and its relationship to their own political loyalties and prevailing opinions about women. These factors, it

seems, serve to endorse Collingwood's ⁽⁹⁾ contention that whilst historians and commentators might regard themselves as impartial and objective, they are indeed highly selective in the topics they choose to study, in the methods they employ and in the interpretations they bring to their work. They choose what they want to see and ignore the rest. This is not to say that conventional scholars are necessarily right or wrong, though their level of rigour or sensitivity may be open to question, but that their accounts need to be understood and interpreted as necessarily partial. Evidence, as we have seen Thompson assert ⁽¹⁰⁾, needs to be scrutinised not only for its accuracy but for its very existence, and why it was selected for investigation in the first place.

Further, this study also shows that readers of texts are equally subject to bias, partial both in their choice of topics of interest and in their interpretation of accounts. The subjectivity of the reader is most in evidence in the portrayals of Harriet Martineau - so diverse, yet drawing largely on the same texts.

What has become evident during the course of this study is that historians' and other scholars' search for the 'truth' should be viewed with some caution. This study of Harriet Martineau provides clear support for claims, first, that historiography (including the writing of lives) is a subjective medium and second, that a full appreciation of texts can only be achieved in the full knowledge of the discursive and cultural frameworks in which researchers are

situated. Even then, texts will be interpreted in different ways, filtered through the selective and subjective eye of the reader.

Thus, given their discursive frameworks, it comes as no surprise that it has been feminists who have sought to restore Harriet Martineau to prominence and who have struggled most to create a past for women to inherit. In contrast, male scholars have either avoided choosing women as subjects of study or diminished their achievements; perhaps through lack of empathy or motivation as already suggested, or because of subconscious interest in maintaining the patriarchal domination of epistemology. Further, the treatment of women as generally inferior to men needs to be understood in the context of prevailing (patriarchal) ideologies held about, and discourses on, women.

Future developments in research on women, it is hoped, will utilise feminist and materialist theories, and multi-layered research approaches, to explore different dimensions in their lives. Researchers could, for example, incorporate the work of Riley, Delmar or Wallach Scott ⁽¹¹⁾ into 'chronological' evaluations of individual women's lives in relation to changing perceptions of the category of 'woman'. Or examination could be made of women's own changing perceptions of the category of 'woman' during their lifetimes. Women's networks could be explored, for example, drawing on the survey of 158 women undertaken as a sub-study for this thesis; or women's adjustments and resistances to cultural change documented. In adopting these approaches, researchers may present a

less simple view of events, yet produce a richer analysis of the unfolding of history. History, and other forms of knowledge too will then include women's experience as well as achieving the aims, suggested by Raymond Williams, of showing 'us most kinds of knowable past and almost every kind of imaginable future'. (12)

Harriet Martineau's observation that the 'Woman Question' could be resolved only through the efforts of women themselves, is, perhaps, an apt ending to the discussion about feminist scholarship and to this thesis: 'The progression of emancipation of any class usually, if not always, takes place through the efforts of the individuals of that class: and so it must be here'. (13)

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- 1854: 17 March, 13 June, 28 June, 5 July, 8 July.
- 1855: 26 November, 6 December.
- 1856: 2 April, 26 March, 29 November.
- 1857: 13 January, 30 January, 26 May, 5 June.
- 1858: 28 May.
- 1859: 25 March, 19 September, 3 October.
- 1860: 15 March, 20 August.
- 1861: 14 September, 24 September.
- 1862: 17 July, 21 July.
- 1863: 20 September, & 4 letters (4, 15, 20, 25 September).
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- 1865: 18 January.
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